New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1945

Volume VI, Number 3. • *Yearly Subscription* $15.00 • Week of February 26, 1945

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THEATRE OPENINGS

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Complete reviews appear in this issue

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NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS : : : 235 EAST 22ND STREET, NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

"And Be My Love"

Comedy by Edward Caulfield; staging by Arthur J. Beckhard; setting designed by Raymond Sovey; presented by Arthur J. Beckhard, in association with Victor Hugo-Vidal, at the National Theater Wednesday evening, February 21, 1945.

NEW YORK POST
February 22, 1945

An Embarrassing Evening At the National Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

IN the course of any Broadway theatrical season, a reviewer spends many a dismal evening longing to be somewhere else. Last Wednesday at the National found us hoping for a magic carpet a bit more passionately than usual, for "And Be My Love" is not only one of the dullest comedies in recent months, but revoltingly infantile as well, and embarrassing to boot, for Walter Hampden is the star, and Mr. Hampden appeared at that same National Theatre something over twenty years ago in "Cyrano de Bergerac."

The mere thought of what Mr. Hampden was acting then and what he is acting now is enough to chill the blood, but even leaving Mr. Hampden and his past out of it, "And Be My Love" is a fearsome object in the theatre.

The author, Edward Caulfield, has been thinking about what would happen if a noted actor were to wander into a matrimonial bureau by mistake, meet a widow there and decide to settle down in Connecticut under an assumed name.

The assumed name, as it turns out, is not at all necessary, since nobody in the vicinity ever heard of the real one, and it is apparently the author's intention to poke fun at the foibles of the acting profession, at the same time working up a nice little love story involving two people in the autumn of life.

This he does with almost unbelievable ineptitude, putting everybody on the stage at a disadvantage and indulging now and then in some puerile attempts to be mildly smutty that are, if possible, even duller than the witticisms.

Just because Mr. Hampden has spent much of his career playing the classics is no reason why he shouldn't come out in a modern comedy if he wants to, but the next time he feels in the mood, let us all hope he picks a less depressing script.

The program states that Lotus Robb, who plays opposite Mr. Hampden as the widow, was persuaded by the producer, Arthur J. Blackhard, to return to the stage after fifteen years in retirement. Miss Robb, who also has a notable career behind her, succeeds in overlooking the play so completely that we envied her detachment. Never have we seen anyone actually take part in a production, yet remain so far away from it. She seemed bent on ignoring the whole thing, and who can blame her?

Violet Heming came in for a while in the second act for a bout of what the author obviously considers side-splitting Broadway talk, and Viola Dean managed to be fairly funny as the colored maid along toward the end.

Those in the audience who stuck it out either sat in stunned silence or indulged in bursts of wild laughter, obviously on the verge of hysteria.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
February 22, 1945

'And Be My Love' Opens at National

By ROBERT GARLAND

WALTER HAMPDEN, of all actors, has pulled a Jack Barrymore on his up-to-now faithful followers, kidding the pants off his past, his present and his future. And in as tasteless, tactless and tiresome a farce-comedy as these disappointed eyes ever hope not to see.

If you put on your hat and hurry, you may find him still hanging around the National Theatre, having himself—but nobody else, I fancy—a perfectly lovely time in "And Be My Love," a vermicular vehicle he and Arthur J. Beckard, not to mention one Victor Hugo-Vidal, picked up last Summer somewhere in the State of Massachusetts.

Why, I just can't imagine. For "And Be My Love" has nothing whatever to recommend it, not even the gifted ladies—the Lotus Robb, the Esther Dale, the Edmonia Nolley and the Violet Heming—who ornament its cast much as a mouse ornaments a mousetrap.

In fact, every player upon the National's long-suffering stage seems to be trapped in Edward Caulfield's meandering misdemeanor, with dialogue. Every player, with the exception of Mr. Hampden. He, as the saying goes, enjoys himself tremendously. He even goes so far as to retell a smutty story. The old one about Pisces.

Somewhere a Story

There must be a plot to "And Be My Love." But where it is and what it's about, I can't remember. Walter Hampden, known as Henry—no, not Harvey—sets out to be a hammy old actor who isn't altogether there. He's tired and retired, but, I regret to say, all too audible.

In a Lonely Hearts Get-together—whatever a Lonely Hearts Get-together may be—he meets Sarah Fenton, a working widow on the look-out for a male companion. Uncertain about Henry and his male companionship, she brings him to her chalet in Connecticut. Back in the good old days, they referred to such goings-on as "trial marriage."

But soto voce! Now, talked about in the open, it sounds as dull as Drinkwater. And just about as sexy! Henry, who is Walter Hampden, and Sarah, who is Lotus Robb, care as much about each other as do Butch and the tin-horn gamblers. But they're less demonstrative.

Nevertheless, the evening meanders on, with Sarah's sister, Sarah's daughter, Sarah's daughter's boy-friend, Sarah's neighbors, Sarah's neighbors' neighbors, Sarah's advisors, Sarah's servants and a slew of off-stage characters who come and go for no comprehensible reason, talking their empty heads off. Who wins? I've forgotten.

As for Acting

Well, the acting should be seen to be depreciated. Of Walter Hampden, there's little left to tell. Except that he's as cute as cute can be. He tosses with the head. He rolls with the eye. He skips with the feet. He spoofs with the tongue. Throughout an enervating evening!

And the so-called supporting cast? Well, the so-called supporting cast stands back and lets him do it. "Go to it, Walter," its members seem to say. "This play is yours. You're welcome to it." And he is, as this first-nighter is their witness. Jack Barrymore, at the height of his lowest period, could have been no more exhibitionistic.

Lotus Robb, after a 15-year off-stage recess, looks on and says "Go to it, Walter!" Esther Dale, who is Mrs. Producer Beckard, looks on and says "Go to it, Walter!" Violet Heming, who traces her heritage back to John Heming, looks on and says "Go to it, Walter!"

Walter goes to it! He not only kids himself, his past, his present and his future. He kids Ibsen of "The Master Builder," Shakespeare of "Hamlet," Rostand of "Cyrano," Kingsley of "The Patriots," and Kaufman and Hart of "The Man Who Came to Dinner." And, of course, one Caulfield of "And Be My Love." He'd better have stood in bed!

THE CAST

Sarah Fenton	Lotus Robb
Henry	Walter Hampden
Martha Webster	Esther Dale
Mrs. Spence	Edmonia Nolley
Mr. Spence	Sydney Grant
Phyllis	Ruth Homond
Allen	Charles Colby
Mrs. Fillmore	Jed Prouty
Ada Bennett	Violet Heming
Lizzie	Viola Dean
The Stranger	Graham Velsey

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
February 22, 1945

A Slow Trip to the Altar

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

BROADWAY having lain fallow for a whole week, up sprouted something on Wednesday night called *And Be My Love*. But the wind of criticism is from the north today, and very blighting: the sprout, I fear, is a goner. Mr. Caulfield's comedy, however harmless, is a stupefying bore, a very opiate of a play. It tackles one of those little ideas that are better rejected in the first place, and it pursues it implacably, relentlessly, long act after long act, never in terms of action, always in terms of chatter.

Said work concerns a middle-aged widow and a middle-aged bachelor who have met through a marriage bureau and are putting in a trial period at the lady's home in Connecticut. When her daughter and old-maid sister turn up, the pair have to pretend they are married already; and on from there plods the play, till they finally do get married, and the daughter gets married to a sailor, and the sister presumably gets married to a judge (at least the bureau sends one round). It also turns out that the widow is medically renowned, while her mate is pretty distinguished as an actor.

* * *

All this is played *large*, with most of the situations repeated half a dozen times, and with the man from the marriage bureau (who is quite a card) reporting with the regularity of a criminal on probation. At one point there is even some hideous jesting about the signs of the zodiac. Mr. Caulfield, to be fair to him, once in a while turns out a fairly bright line, but nothing that threatens his mastery over dull ones.

As the actor, Walter Hampden probably enjoyed himself more than any one else at the National Wednesday night, for the script permitted him to do all kinds of usually forbidden things—strut and pose and orate, sing snatches of song, don false beards, stretch out on the floor. Lotus Robb came out of a 15-year retirement to play the lady—a pretty thankless job. Violet Heming plays another lady, in an emphatic comedy style. Esther Dale plays the old maid, and gets a few wisps of amusement out of it; while Jed Prouty recurs as the man from the marriage bureau.

NEW YORK TIMES
February 22, 1945

Autumn Romance

By LEWIS NICHOLS

FOR its final opening of the month, the theatre has gotten out of hand again. Edward Caulfield's "And Be My Love," which opened at the National last evening is another of those comedies which act like a pipe in the mouth of a cigarette smoker—all effort, no fun. It is long-winded and it labors its jokes unmercifully; it talks its audience into a state of stupor and then goes on and on as though it didn't know when, where or how to stop. It has the one virtue of restoring Walter Hampden to the local scene, but the part is not his best, and Cyrano has a pretty rough time of it.

The play is about an autumn romance. A middle-aged woman scientist finds a man at a marriage broker's party and brings him home for a sort of companionate trial whirl. She has a daughter who wants to marry the usual Navy uniform, and there are compli-

cations on the part of relatives and townspeople. It develops finally that the man is an actor, which no doubt explains a good deal, that he wandered into the broker's party by mistake and that he really does love the woman scientist. A few of Mr. Caulfield's lines are fairly funny, but the ratio is about the same as existing between pearls and oysters. A few of Mr. Caulfield's lines also are needlessly tasteless.

As the ham actor set down in rural Connecticut, Mr. Hampden has himself a fine time with posturing, eyebrowraising and sudden changes in inflection. Lotus Robb gives a gentle performance as the middle-age scientist and Esther Dale is wry and amusing as her completely-horrified sister. Jed Prouty is the marriage broker, Violet Heming is the actress companion of the man and there is a nicely done bit by Viola Dean as a part-time maid. The comedy has a fair amount of theatre talk, one of Mr. Hampden's lines being to the effect that reporters are after him, the reporters and "Zolotow's Indians." Those Indians returned to the tepee early this morning. They have orders to wait until Mr. Hampden is in something better than "And He My Love."

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
February 22, 1945

No "Cyrano"

By HOWARD BARNES

WALTER HAMPDEN stalks through a supposedly comic imbroglio in the new play at the National Theater. "And Be My Love" asks the star to pretend that he is the member of a lonely hearts club, a naturalist, a confidence man and an actor. He comes off rather badly in all this theatrical sleight-of-hand. So do most of his assistants in this Edward Caulfield play. It starts with a minimum of spin and runs down faster than any stage top that has contributed a bit of chiaroscuro to the local scene recently. The blunt truth is that this Arthur J. Beckhard production is a tedious show which has almost nothing to say and does that haltingly.

* * *

Whatever central idea the author had in mind has been spread so thinly in the plot and dialogue that it is difficult to see what kept him doggedly trying to drag it into three acts. The supposition of the work is that a famous character actor meets a widowed Connecticut scientist, woos and wins her on a trial marriage project, keeps his prospective step-daughter from doing the same thing and finally goes to the altar with no little sense of fitness about the whole matter. There may be a vague honesty about the idea. There is no dramatic fitness about its projection.

* * *

Mr. Hampden is a veteran who can affect many moods on the stage. He is equally at home in Shakespeare, Ibsen and "The Hunchback of Notre Dame." In "And Be My Love" he has to carry a trite tale of autumnal marital parrying without any benefit of swordplay, fancy costumes or rounded phrases. That he fails to pull the piece into an entertaining continuity or unity is less his fault than that of the author. He has a thankless task and it is not bettered by the Beckhard staging.

* * *

His supporting players number several veterans. Lotus Robb is back on the stage after a decade and a half to give a singularly uncertain impersonation of the lady from Connecticut who hooks up with a famous actor without knowing who he is and marries him for love, even when she finds out that he is an actor. Esther Dale plays her suspicious sister with emphasis; Violet Heming has a brief and badly written part as the echo from the actor's past; Jed Prouty clowns with little effect as the matrimonial agency's chief agent and Viola Dean breezes through the later scenes as a Negro maid with more gusto than conviction. "And Be My Love" is a tepid play, trying tepid talents to the utmost.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
February 22, 1945

'And Be My Love' Fails to Add Up As Comedy for Walter Hampden

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IN choosing Walter Hampden for the role of an actor—a stage hero slumming among the simplicities of a widow's Connecticut home—Producers Arthur J. Beckhard and Victor Hugo-Vidal have done a very good piece of casting. But when it came to choosing a play for Mr. Hampden they picked "And Be My Love" and this is an unhappy selection.

"And Be My Love" is one of those comedies which can be killed by kindness. You can think up nice little things to say about it—that it is pleasant, and homey, and unpretentious, and mild, and sprinkled with funny lines, and well played; you can say these things and every one of them damns it. The truth is that it is long and thin, and not nearly robust enough to fight its way through this troublesome world.

Lots of Nice People

I say this with regret, for Edward Caulfield's play has brought to the National Theatre a number of people whose presence should be welcomed. Mr. Beckhard, for instance, whose work as a producer has always been intelligent and careful. Hampden, of course, because he is a part of the New York stage itself. Lotus Robb, because she returns after an absence of fifteen years and brings with her an appealing sweetness. Violet Heming, because she is Violet Heming. And Esther Dale, because, if for no other reason, she once was splendid in the title role of "Carry Nation."

"And Be My Love" is a mildly unbelievable comic mess in which an actor, wanting to Get Away From It All, finds himself in the home of a widow (Miss Robb) whom he has met in a matrimonial agency. He hasn't married her but is having a fine time resting; yet one can be sure at curtain's rise that love will find its way by the end of the third act.

There is, too, the inevitable Young Love sub-plot involving the inevitable service man—in this case a sailor—and his girl. A great deal of energy has been misspent in making a matrimonial agency agent funny, and Miss Heming comes in for a while just to be Miss Heming.

It just doesn't add up to very much.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
February 22, 1945

'And Be My Love' Fails to Woo Favor

By BURTON RASCOE

WALTER HAMPDEN, the noted Shakespearean actor who was also a famous Cyrano, should never have allowed himself to appear, as he is required to appear, in Edward Caulfield's essentially delightful little satiric farce-comedy, "And Be My Love," which opened at the National on Wednesday night. By being miscast and misdirected, as a star, Mr. Hampden (I think) ruined a far-above-average, very good entertainment.

In fact, if there was ever a play more thoroughly done in by the production than "And Be My Love," I can't recall it. Only five players—Lotus Robb, Esther Dale, Jed Prouty, Violet Heming and Viola Dean—out of a total of 11, all important to the visualization of the script, were chosen with intelligent care, and these five (as well as all the rest) were so wretchedly directed that only Miss Robb and Miss Dean emerged tranquil, proficient and unscathed.

No Role for Hampden

In "And Be My Love" Mr. Hampden is called upon to enact a broad, satirical caricature of all aging matinee idols, which means self-caricature; and Mr. Hampden has no talent for self-caricature. There is no reason why he should have; many of the greatest artists of all times have lacked a sense of humor; indeed, a lack of it made many of them, including Tolstoi, Hugo, Salvini, Chopin, Keats and Booth, great.

But without a sense of humor and an ability to laugh at himself, Mr. Hampden should not have allowed himself to be engaged for this role. I can imagine Adolphe Menjou, Fredric March, Louis Calhern, Alfred Lunt, Frederick Tozere or any one of half a dozen others, including especially the late John Barrymore, in Mr. Hampden's role and carrying the part in such hilarious fashion that (with a sensibly directed supporting cast) the play would be a scream of a farce-comedy. The role requires a finesse and a happy sense of the hamminess of hams, plus a conspicuous inner dignity, beneath the buffoonery, which would make the audience realize that there is finesse, competence, perception and intelligence, even if the character is hollow and superficial in many respects.

The story tells of a middle-aged actor, such as Daphne Du Maurier depicts her father, Gerald, as being—a public idol, weak, willless, of infinite romantic charm, much sought-after by women—who yearns, now and then, to get away from the squabbles with producers, directors, leading ladies, agents; to settle down somewhere with the sort of woman who has never heard of him but loves him for his own self alone and who would adore to darn his sox by the fireside of an evening while he stretched out on the couch smoking his pipe. (He loathes a pipe and can't see any sense in all that needlework; but he has played so many roles depicting such stigmata of domestic happiness that he imagines it would be blissful to try it.)

Meet the Woman

Accidentally straying, incognito, into a soiree of a matrimonial bureau, he meets just the sort of female (Lotus Robb) who is an answer to his dreams of getting away from it all: she is a sweet and attractive widow, with a comfortable income and an unincumbered house, with a fireplace, in the country—unincumbered, that is to say, with anything except a semi-delinquent daughter, a lame-brain prospective son-in-law, a vixenish old maid sister, assorted bridge companions all on the moronic side, and monthly visits by a collector for a matrimonial bureau.

But all the good stuff in this satiric farce-comedy is fluffed so badly that the play seems boring and witless.

THE NEW YORK SUN
February 22, 1945

Mr. Hampden's New Comedy, 'And Be My Love,' a Meager and Trifling Play

By WARD MOREHOUSE

"AND BE MY LOVE" is a summer-theater play and it still has that look as it is submitted to Broadway. This new piece, a meager and trifling comedy, brings Walter Hampden back to the theater in the role of a retired actor trying his hand at romance in rural Connecticut.

Mr. Hampden and his associates opened Wednesday evening at the National under the sponsorship of Arthur J. Beckhard, operating in association with Victor Hugo-Vidal. Mr. Beckhard directed. "And Be My Love" may have been all right for a summer's lark in Cambridge, but it isn't nearly sturdy enough for Broadway competition.

"And Be My Love" is about a famous trouper one John Hogarth, who is weary of the stage and is yearning for the simple life. He and the attractive Widow Fenton, having met via a marriage broker, go in for trial matrimony in the widow's nice house in the town of Riverhead, thereby creating quite a stir. Hogarth's erstwhile leading lady comes upon the scene and seeks to lure him back to his profession and he does go with her to the city but he returns almost im-

mediately to take the widow for his bride and to settle down for a long run of peace and domesticity. As an added inducement, the town of Riverhead has given him the post of water commissioner.

Mr. Hampden goes after the role of the great Hogarth with relish and it is quite evident that he has a grand time playing it, but neither he nor his co-players can do anything to bring life to "And Be My Love." There are chuckles here and there but for most of the way the comedy is quite thin and very foolish.

Lotus Robb, who was so delightful in several comedies of the Broadway theater of a good many seasons ago, is back as the wistful Widow Fenton. I wish she could have found a better part for her return. Violet Heming, of the perennial good looks, wastes a lot of vivacity and vitality on the role of the actress. Esther Dale has a few amusing moments as the widow's testy, gabbling, meddling sister, who finally goes on her own account to the lonely hearts bureau. Raymond Sovey, again demonstrating that a scenic designer's art is frequently superior to a playwright's, has created a cozy New England interior that might tempt many an actor into retirement.

"And Be My Love" gives Mr. Hampden a vacation from heavier things, but it doesn't give him much of a play. Mr. Caulfield's comedy won't do. An early curfew is likely.

"Signature"

Play by Elizabeth McFadden; staging by Roy Hargrave; production designed by Stewart Chaney; presented by Richard Skinner and Dorothy Willard at the Forrest Theater Wednesday, February 14, 1945.

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
February 15, 1945

'Signature' New Play At Forrest Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

"WHERE there's a will there's a play" is one of the showshop's oldest rulings. "Signature," which has taken possession of the Forrest Theatre's stage, is no exception.

If old man Marsh, of pre-Civil War Virginia, hadn't left a wacky sort of testament, his grandson, *circa* 1856, wouldn't have been strangled in the privacy of the old family homestead.

And if he hadn't been strangled, not to say shot and messed up generally, there'd have been no blood-and-thunder last night in 49th st. This would have been unfortunate. Taking it as it comes, "Signature" is fun.

Elizabeth McFadden, who, once upon a time turned out a piece called "Double Door," has founded "Signature" on a short story by Melville Davisson Post entitled "Naboth's Vineyard."

Not letting it fool me for a second, "Signature" is plain old-fashioned corn of the ten-twent'-thirt' variety. It's not even in modern dress.

Yet, with its baying bloodhounds, its chirping katydids, its twinkling fireflies, its secret drawers, its missing papers, its self-opening door, its crashing glass, its flickering lamplights, its sinister shadows, its offstage mobs, its—

Yes, suh, there also is a shotgun!

No Whodunit

The story of a brutal murder among the green hills of Virginny, "Signature" is no whodunit. To the contrary! From the first part of the opening act you know who did the killing.

Nevertheless, a young hired hand and his local sweetheart are accused of the heinous undertaking. But the evidence has been planted. To complicate the situation the yokel belle confesses to the crime in order to protect her boy friend.

They're nice kids, the pair of them, but definitely on the dumb side. They'd practically have hanged themselves had it not been for John Cartwright, a rising young lawyer.

This rising young lawyer, this John Cartwright of Virginia, believes in them, just as he does not believe in the Simon Kilrail who, in his own courtroom, is to judge them.

Why should he? If there ever was a guilty man, a criminal in the gown of Justice, that man is the Honorable Mr. Kilrail.

He trembles at the baying of a bloodhound. He pales at the chirping of a katydid. He slinks about his chambers like the murderer he is, while our young hero and our younger heroine languish separately in an adjacent jail. He even hides the missing papers in a secret, yet not too secret, drawer, in his own judicial table. . . .

Yes, suh, he's a dirty dastard!

Visibly Guilty

In a cast consisting of 29 or 30 assorted performers, it's somewhat difficult to tell one player from another. Half the characters in "Signature" could go home and you'd have a better drama.

I'm sure, however, that Frederic Tozere is the guilty judge, the blood-stained Virginian who is on the verge of being nominated for the Governorship of his commonwealth. A blind man, seated in the audience, could see that he is guilty.

So guilty is he that he forgets his lines, while the lawyer for the defense is good enough to prompt him. He's scared, all right, as well he may be. And the opposition knows it.

Donald Murphy, as that lawyer for the defense, that opposition, is likely looking and not too unconvincing. He's a good guy, too, going so far as to come momentarily to the guilty party's rescue.

Marjorie Lord, fresh from the screen's "Johnny Come Lately," is a pretty and helpless heroine. Bob Stevenson—I think—is a handsome and helpless hero. Helen Ray enjoys herself as Aunt Sophie Gide, who knows everything there is to know but won't tell just for the hell of it.

There's a slew of others—24 or 25 of them—from a Peter Pan to a Frederic Faber. They work well enough together under Roy Hargrave in a Stewart Chaney setting. . . .

Yes, suh, here's sere and mellow drama.

THE CAST

Judge Simon Kilrail	Frederic Tozere
Zeke	Morris McKenney
Charles Borse	Lawrence Fletcher
Thadeus Braxton	Charles Francis
John Cartwright	Donald Murphy
Randolph	Lyster Chambers
Abner Davisson	Judson Laire
Nora Davisson	Marjorie Lord
Lance Moor	Charles Keane
First Guard	William Forester
William Taylor	Bob Stevenson
Fendler	Charles S. Dubin
Alice Steuart	Anne Jackson
Second Guard	Lew Herbert
Nathaniel Madison	George Lessey
Aunt Sophie Gide	Helen Ray
Dr. Martin Storm	John McKee
Hon. Thomas Fargon	Gregory Robins
Diccon	Page Spencer
Morrey	Bruce Halsey
Rev. Rockford	Peter Pann
Henry	Coby Neal
Arnold	Harry Kadison
Dayton	Charles Kuhn
Rev. Adam Rider	Cyrus Staehle
Aikiri	Frederic Faber
Donovan	Edwin Cushman
Elnathan Stone	Glenn Regent
Ward	William McMillen

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
February 15, 1945

Old-Fashioned & Shortweight

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

BROADWAY is specializing in thrillers this week; but unfortunately, they're not very long on thrills. *Signature*, I am glad to report, is considerably less talky and trying than *The Stranger* was; for a while, indeed, it is not without its points as strictly old-fashioned melodrama. But it fails to make the grade. Indeed, by mid-evening there isn't much left for it to do but rehash on the stage all the evidence it has already relayed to the audience.

Set in Virginia just before the Civil War, *Signature* is a murder yarn without being a murder mystery. You know directly that not the two young people accused of the crime, but the judge who will preside over their trial, is the murderer. The interest lies partly in finding out the judge's motive for his crime, but chiefly in observing how those who believe in the young people's innocence will sniff out and substantiate the judge's guilt. This interest is passably sustained into the second act; then, with a rush, you learn all there is to know. After that, there's nothing left but how to get around the problem of indicting a judge who can manipulate the law in his own behalf. Miss McFadden tries to dress things up with some conventional spookeroo stuff and a crowded-courtroom exposure scene; but she has spoken her piece, and it does no good to speak it a second time with gestures.

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The more so as the "language" of the piece is pretty old-fashioned at best. *Signature* is full of stagy flourishes and slightly quaint machinery; doors creak; windows fly open; hounds bay; and the characters are right out of the manual. I rather like all this when it adds up to enough, just as I rather like murder yarns in which you know who committed the crime. But such yarns take doing; and they usually come off best when you are permitted to watch some very patient and ingenious detective work, with the criminal pitting his skill against the sleuths. Instead, Miss McFadden has tried a little of everything—draping the stage with some 30 characters—and wound up with not much of anything.

The production is pretty good in an obvious way; Roy Hargrave has kept it moving as long as there is anything to move. Frederic Tozere plays the judge nicely enough in the style of a Very Guilty Man; and Donald Murphy is Fearless and Unswerving as the young lawyer who shows him up. Anne Jackson is pretty and appealing as one of the accused, and Bob Stevenson suitably manly as the other. I particularly liked Lawrence Fletcher, who played a bullying prosecutor with the real right force for melodrama. Stewart Chaney has designed a rather impressive set through whose windows glow-worms flicker in the night.

NEW YORK TIMES
February 15, 1945

Sprawling Signature

By LEWIS NICHOLS

SINCE the current week has been devoted to the serious study of melodrama, the sound and final play of the genre came to the Forrest last evening under the name of "Signature." It is the work of Elizabeth McFadden, who a few years back turned out

a good one in "Double Door." Lightning has not yet struck the same author twice, for her new play is a little too sprawling for comfort. It is filled with mechanical hokum, sound effects and characters galore, and into its yawning maw have been tossed chunks of all types of melodrama. What it lacks is suspense and credibility; those people up on the stage obviously are just actors and not residents of Virginia in 1856.

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Miss McFadden, basing her play on Melville Davisson Post's story, "Naboth's Vineyard," takes the audience into her confidence about the murder. The victim had been a wealthy man, and his temporary hired hand is arrested immediately. Miss McFadden makes it obvious almost at once that he had nothing to do with it, nor had his girl friend—despite her confession—and she comes right out with the name of the murderer half way through. The last part of the play is concerned with trapping the fellow, and the author doesn't let the characters do it by guile or the rules of evidence or reason. She does it by firm playwriting. Having offended budding detectives in the first half, she offends budding lawyers in the second. Melodrama needs audience participation.

Not that Miss McFadden is unaware of the stock phrases and incidents of melodrama, or that she and her director, Roy Hargrave, are averse to using them in full. There is the houn' dawg which bays before the murder and then follows the murderer home. There is the singing of Negro spirituals, as the townspeople hope the law won't hang the young girl. There is a backdrop of fireflies, the sound of katydids, a secret drawer, an old will, the sudden opening of a door, the banging of shutters as a night wind rises suddenly. Since there is no secret about the murderer, and all that remains is to catch him, these bits of stage business serve only as distractions. "Signature!" could stand more thought and less atmosphere.

Frederic Tozere has the part of a judge who has aspirations to be Governor; he gives a reasonable picture only part of the time. Donald Murphy is fair enough as a young attorney who decides justice will miscarry if the farm hand and the young lady go to the gallows. Lawrence Fletcher is quietly earnest as the prosecuting attorney, and Anne Jackson is attractive as the girl. The cast, assembled by Richard Skinner and Dorothy Willard, is a tremendous one; it is so big, in fact, its members sometimes get into one another's way. Stewart Chaney, who is designing practically all the settings these days, has offered another good one in this conference room of a courthouse.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
February 15, 1944

Not Legible

By HOWARD BARNES

TAGGING the killer at the outset of a murder melodrama has its points. They are hard to find in "Signature!" This Elizabeth McFadden play about a wicked nineteenth century strangler in a hill town of Virginia starts with something of a wallop, but deteriorates quickly into shadow-boxing. The only suspense you will find in the latter stanzas of the supposed thriller at the Forrest Theater is tied up with a creaking-door routine, which unhappily has the door ajar at all the wrong times. Whatever plotting there is in the show comes under the heading of pure nonsense.

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The trick of exposing a culprit in advance and building suspense on his apprehension is both palpable and pathetic in "Signature!" The original story by Melville Devisson Post, known as "Naboth's Vineyard," may have worked magic on the printed page. The Richard Skinner-Dorothy Willard production does not even have the non-guilty members of the cast fooled for a minute. It is merely a matter of having a homicidal hypocrite brought to his just deserts and a lot of mumbo-jumbo about the rights of the electorate to administer justice prolongs a tedious charade rather than making it more provocative.

Under Roy Hargrave's rather cluttered direction, the piece tries to make up for its lack of melodramatic substance by having a lot of characters milling around the stage. From the moment that a mournful hound dog and suspicious katydids put the finger on the murderer there is only one moment of latent or overt terror in the exposition. Since this has the avaricious strangler sneaking through the creaking door and then sneaking away again for no good reason, as he is about to throttle his nemesis, it is more funny than fearful.

* * *

Frederic Tozere has the brunt of the melodramatic make-believe to sustain, and he rarely succeeds in sustaining it. Somewhat better is Donald Murphy in the role of a high-minded young attorney who invokes the rights of pretrial conference to nail the murderer and have the necks of two innocent bystanders. Anne Jackson, Morris McKenney and Lyster Chambers work hard at characters that persist in staying as flat as pancakes. "Signature!" has a very faint promise of suspense and terror. It builds into a tiny peep of dramatic excitement.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
February 15, 1945

'Signature!' Opens at the Forest

By BURTON RASCOE

I ENJOYED myself thoroughly at the Forrest last night at a presentation of "Signature!" a murder melodrama by Elizabeth McFadden from a short story by Melville Davisson Post. It is something more than a chiller-diller (although it has many spine-tingling moments of excitement and suspense). It is also an intelligent and thoughtful play about the plain citizen's responsibility, under a democracy, for the preservation of other citizens' rights and the triumph of justice. I should think the play would be around for quite some time.

"Signature!" is not a whodunit; so I am not violating the ethics of my trade when I tell you what the story is about. The identity of the killer is disclosed very early in the proceedings. The problem of the author is to disclose how, from very meager circumstantial evidence, the murderer's guilt is established. And it is also the problem of the author to convince you of all the processes by which an eager young lawyer (whose oath—like every lawyer's oath—pledges him as an agent of justice and not as a special pleader) and some clear-headed elders thwarted lynch law and political pressure and thus prevented a legal murder.

Virginia, 1856.

The scene is laid in a hill town of Virginia in 1856. In spite of some of the misconceptions of various illiterati of the North, Virginia has been one state jealous of the right of assembly (and in spite of the recent William and Mary incident), most consistently democratic in its judicial and legislative processes. The constitution of Virginia, largely framed by Thomas Jefferson, embraced all the principles of the Bill of Rights, converted estates into fee-simple, abolished the inequalities of primogeniture, established freedom of religious opinion and would have abolished slavery if Jefferson had had his way; and Virginians, by and large, always have held these principles to be sacred.

Therefore, when a young itinerant farmhand and the daughter of a tenant farmer are accused of the murder of an elderly wealthy plantation owner (whom the girl's parents had forced her to become engaged to) and are about to be lynched by a mob of outraged citizens, led by a drunken bully, John Cartright (Donald Murphy), a fledgling lawyer, prevails upon the older and sober heads of the town to see to it that the young couple get a fair trial in order that the honor of the community may be preserved.

Dramatic Moment.

Evidence is gradually and deviously disclosed, before the case comes up before Judge Kilrail (Frederic Tozere), that the judge himself is the murderer. How the evidence comes to light, and how the leading citizens guard their knowledge until they are satisfied of the distinguished judge's guilt, is the suspenseful and exciting story of "Signature!"

Probably the most dramatic moment of the year in the theater is one in the third act when it finally dawns upon the assembly of citizens of all classes that they each have a grave personal responsibility and one by one, rise to outlaw the judge's arbitrary ruling to dismiss the hearing. This is a triumph of the direction of Roy Hargrave. It brought a lump into my throat.

Mr. Tozere has added yet another fine characterization to his successful roles; and Mr. Murphy has moved closer to deserved stardom. But the whole cast is notably effective, with particular honors going to Lyster Chambers, Marjorie Lord, Anne Jackson, Charles Francis, John McKee and Gregory Robins. An atmospheric setting, with weird sound effects, has been furnished by Stewart Chaney. Richard Skinner and Dorothy Willard, the producers, are to be roundly congratulated upon their heart-warming thriller.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
February 15, 1945

Katydids, a Dawg and 29 Actors Can't Make 'Signature' a Drama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

ON THE stage of the Forrest Theatre last night there were twenty-nine actors.

Backstage there were sound recordings of katydids, mobs, negro singers and wind. Backstage, too, was a man who could howl like a ole houn' dawg, and another one to work mammoth electric fireflies outside the courthouse window.

All of this was for a play, "Signature," and it was too much. The drama just couldn't shoulder its way through; it was set upon by too many things, including the author.

Elizabeth McFadden dramatized "Signature" from a short story by Melville Davisson Post and it tells of the law and how it was run in a Virginia hill town in 1856. It's a murder investigation, and with the period and setting it should be colorful and lusty. Instead it is exciting only for an occasional moment and the rest of the time it just flaps around. Miss McFadden has padded her scenario with so many characters that she hasn't been able to give any one of them enough attention to make him real.

Wrongfully Accused

It seems a lad is accused of murdering a wealthy farmer. Along comes his girl and says she did it, to save him. But actually it was the judge himself who done it—the one who's going to try the case.

An upstanding young attorney unmasks his honor, and the last act is taken up by the cumbersome process of letting the judge conduct a hearing as to whether or not he should let himself be pinched A program foothote says the legal procedure is according to Virginia law, and I won't contest it; but it unhappily is not according to theatre.

Frederic Tozere played the judge last night with sufficient villainy to have the audience hissing him. As the boy and girl, Bob Stevenson and Anne Jackson handle their brief assignments very well and should have no difficulty in remaining on Broadway now that they are here.

Lawrence Fletcher makes a picturesque and menacing prosecutor, Donald Murphy is the rising young lawyer and Marjorie Lord is present just for her good looks, which is reason enough.

Roy Hargrave directed; but with such a script his job must have been mainly that of a traffic cop. The setting, by Stewart Chaney, is okay.

NEW YORK POST
February 15, 1945

'Signature!' Piles on the Melodrammer in Ol' Virginny

By WILELLA WALDORF

ELIZABETH McFADDEN, whose "Double Door" is still remembered with appropriate chills by Broadway crime addicts,

has gone back to an old story of Melville Davisson Post's for "Signature!" her latest melodramatic period piece revealed last night at the Forrest Theatre. The title seems curiously restrained in view of the elaborate attempts of the author, stage director and scenic designer to throw the audience into a panic with as weird a collection of atmospheric devices and off-stage noises as any ol' Virginny courthouse ever boasted back in 1856.

Criminology and courts befo' de Wa' (de Civil Wa') weren't what they are now, and Miss McFadden has taken full advantage of the general laxness of the times to railroad a couple of innocents for the murder of Elihu Marsh, when Judge Simon Kilrail, who is to preside at the trial, did the foul deed himself.

Mighty careless about it, too. Lost his gold watch key at the scene of the crime. Acts guilty enough to arouse the suspicions of almost anybody but the Prosecuting Attorney and is actually followed home by Elihu's pet bloodhound who moans and bays and scratches at the door for a whole act before the Judge gets around to sending him after his master.

Chivalry, Sah!

But wait. This is ol' Virginny, remember. An upright young gentleman just out of law school leaps to the defense of the boy and girl accused of the crime. Assisted by some honorable gentry of the neighborhood, he stumbles over the Judge himself as the obvious murderer and all that remains is trying to convict him of the deed in his own court.

All this is set forth in one of Stewart Chaney's most atmospheric settings, piled high with dusty legal tomes, equipped with secret drawers for hiding old wills, weakly lighted as befits the period, and rendered for a while almost overpoweringly pastoral by clouds of glow-worms on the balcony winking on and off like so many flash-lights and a whole chorus of katy-dids rattling away like telegraph instruments in the trees.

Since the play is acted just seriously enough to seem always on the verge of burlesque, without ever going quite over, it is possible to let yourself fall under the spell of the sheer theatricalism of it all for the first couple of acts and even join in the mild shrieking when the Judge almost manages to get his clutching hands on the upright young lawyer who has discovered the will in the secret drawer. . . .

The Courtroom Scene

But the third and final act is the big courtroom scene wherein the youthful defense attorney and his friends endeavor to break down the Judge's legal defenses and show him up as the villain he is. It falls pretty flat, partly because it's a foregone conclusion anyway, and partly because Frederic Tozere as the Judge muffed some of his lines at a climactic moment last night, and made it all seem just a bit too easy for Donald Murphy, who does nicely as his nemesis, assisted by a large and startlingly uneven cast.

The third act will doubtless be very much better played from now on and may even develop a certain amount of good old courtroom zip, but it will never, we greatly fear, live up to the glow-worms and the katy-dids and the baying of the bloodhound that kept scratching at the door of the Judge's chambers.

"Signature!" is shameless melodrama for melodrama's sake, with more lush trimmings than usual, and there's no denying it's quite a lot of fun for a couple of acts at least. When Mr. Tozere gets himself worked more firmly into his part—we understand he entered the cast very recently—he will probably be hissed to the rafters every night.

The title still seems too unassuming though. Why not "The Curse of the Kilrails" or "Elihu Marsh's Revenge"?

NEW YORK SUN
February 15, 1945

'Signature!' Is a Cluttered And Old-style Melodrama, Done at the Forrest

By WARD MOREHOUSE

JUSTICE is done down in the hill-country of Virginia, as of 1856, and the crafty old Judge is unmasked in a cluttered and old-style melodrama of murder called "Signature!" submitted last evening at the Forrest. It's the work of Elizabeth McFadden, author of "Double Door," a rather good thriller of some seasons ago.

In the beginning it is quite apparent to the audience that Judge Simon Kilrail is the man who did in his rich Cousin Elihu Marsh so as to come by 1,000 acres of good Virginia land, but a young man from Oregon territory and his rural sweetheart are under arrest for the murder and the author uses three acts in bringing the Judge to justice.

Yes, three acts, and baying bloodhounds, chirruping katy-dids, doors opening by unseen hands, singing and shouting and murmuring off stage, and finally the fearless and eloquent young attorney comes right out and accuses the Judge in his own conference room of killing the land-owning Marsh by strangulation and then shooting him with an innocent man's gun.

There are enough people in Miss McFadden's clamorous play to put on "Jim the Penman" or "The Squaw Man." These people are paraded about aimlessly, there is never a pause to establish character and the players of "Signature" emerge as just so many stock company actors playing rousing hill-town melodrama.

The evil old Judge, who jumps at the sight of a katydid, shows his guilt in the first moments of the play and "Signature" is a play of scant suspense. Roy Hargrave's direction does keep things moving somewhat, but "Signature" needs better playwriting to give its story and its characters vitality.

The cast assembled by Richard Skinner and Dorothy Willard can't do much for, or with, Miss McFadden's play. Frederic Tozere, making his second appearance of the season, isn't too happy as the Judge, who has his eyes on the Governor's chair in that year of 1856. Donald Murphy works hard as the young lawyer. Marjorie Lord is very pretty in a sketchy role. Bob Stevenson brings some spirit to the part of the young man the Judge is trying to send to the gallows. Stewart Chaney has contributed a good setting.

"Signature," providing another evening of crime for the Broadway theater, is declamatory melodrama—diffuse and old-fashioned.

"The Stranger"

Play by Leslie Reade; staging by Shepard Traube; scenery and lighting by Boris Aronson; costumes supervised by Rose Bogdanoff; presented by Shepard Traube at the Playhouse, Monday evening, February 12, 1945.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
February 13, 1945

No Sequel to 'Angel Street'

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE STRANGER, which Shepard Traube brought to the Playhouse Monday night, is his first Broadway production since *Angel Street*. That alone would have created a special interest in the play; and the fact that it too is a thriller, and it too is laid in gaslit Victorian London, increased the interest. But there the similarity between the two plays pretty well ceases. In its writing *The Stranger* is hardly in the same world as *Angel Street*; and it is, if anything, even less so in its acting and direction. For the eighth time this season the Playhouse has been turned into a funeral parlor.

The Stranger is laid in a workers' club in the London slums at a time when a Jack the Ripper is slaughtering the women of the neighborhood by handfuls. A young foreigner named Mendelsohn, who answers to the description of the murderer, turns up at the club. A highly artistic shoemaker and a spouting egoist, he wins the sympathy of the club's sole female, and then of some of its other members. Meanwhile the murders keep coming and the evidence against Mendelsohn piles up to the ceiling. It is scarcely violating the reviewers' code of secrecy about thrillers to say that you quite soon feel certain that nobody so doubly, triply, quadruply damned as Mendelsohn could possibly be guilty. Indeed, rather than stirring up any suspense as to whether he is or not, *The Stranger* merely provokes in you a mild curiosity as to just how guilty Mendelsohn can be made to seem—for the sake of discovering how his innocence will at length be established. It's sort of like watching a Houdini tie himself up into dozens of knots and then slipping out of them.

THE CAST

Napoleon Mickalieff	Eugene Sigaloff
Jean Prunier	Alfred Hesse
Bill Humphreys	Kim Spalding
Police Constable Hood	Stanley Bell
Christina Thomson	Perry Wilson
Liz	Stella Todd
Mrs. Gregory	Eva Leonard-Boyne
Maggie MacAndrews	Wendy Atkin
David Mendelsohn	Eduard Franz
A Gentleman	Morton L. Stevens

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But even this tame substitute for goose pimples doesn't keep *The Stranger* moving at any kind of clip, because *The Stranger* is one of those yarns that talk your arm off. The club members orate (and with all good will for the workers' cause, I don't think a chiller-diller is the right place, or these wooden characters are the right people, to advance it); an old fortune-teller gabbles and croaks; and Mendelsohn himself is wound up like an eight-day clock. At the end, moreover, he practically goes in for a laying on of hands—has so much in common with that other Stranger of *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* that you expect the stage to be bathed in some kind of unearthly light. *The Stranger* is, I think, the first thriller that made me feel like murmuring "Amen" as the curtain fell.

Just why Mr. Traube took a fancy to so garrulous and unexciting a script isn't easy to fathom, but in any case he has not taken the curse off it in production. His directing shows none of the canny pace, shrewd details and creation of atmosphere that stood out so in *Angel Street*. And the cast, though clearly handicapped by their roles, for the most part far from enhance them. Eduard Franz conveyed to the audience none of the charm he seemed to exercise on so many people in the play; Stanley Bell seemed a terribly tolerant but not very forceful police constable; and Eva Leonard-Boyne struck me as peculiar even for a fortune-teller. As Mendelsohn's young protectress, Perry Wilson was a good deal better; and Alfred Hesse did rather well in a deadly part. But *The Stranger* is deadwood—a very different kind of sleeper from what *Angel Street* was.

NEW YORK TIMES
February 13, 1945

Shoemaker's Holiday

By LEWIS NICHOLS

SHEPARD TRAUBE, whose production of "Angel Street" brought murder to the top of the fine arts, hasn't done so well with his first Broadway offering since then. "The Stranger," it is called, and it is by Leslie

Reade. Once more that old chum, Jack the Ripper, stalks through London, decapitating women and threatening to send their ears to the police. Once more a group of actors is set upon the stage to point suspicion at one another and to harry the luckless and the innocent. Once more, most of the action takes place out of sight, only the lengthy and prosaic reports of same being allowed to filter through. Once more it is at the Playhouse, the scene this season of far too many headless dramas.

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The Stranger of the title is a young shoemaker who has a pale face, bushy hair and a tendency to headaches. He finds a friend in a workers' club, where various odd characters quote a youthful anarchist named Shaw and discuss reform and poverty. Outside, women of the lower orders are being mowed down like ninepins, and suspicion attaches itself to The Stranger, among others. The plot goes this way and that, and it is all pretty mechanical and all rather talky before the Ripper finally is brought to his knees. The figures are not well drawn, and in one or two cases they approach the parody; the policeman of "Angel Street" could make out a good libel suit against his colleague who tries to capture Jack.

The cast has a fairly unhappy time earning its salary. Eduard Franz has the title role; he looks dangerous enough, and before the activities of "The Stranger" get too far out of hand, he gives a reasonable performance. Eugene Sigaloff is all right as a stock anarchist and Perry Wilson is pleasant as the girl who befriends The Stranger. Eva Leonard-Boyne has a weird role as an aged crone who acts as a Cockney Cassandra, and Stanley Bell is far too light on his feet for the police constable. Boris Aronson has designed a good setting. The setting would be better, of course, were the walls covered with blood and did not act simply as a sounding board for words. The play would be better, too.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
February 13, 1945

Our Dear Friend, Jack the Ripper, Turns Up in Traube's 'Stranger'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

If I owned a melodrama, or knew where one could be had, or could write one, I'd run right out and get Shepard Traube to stage it; for Capt. Traube seems to know just where to find the right actors and the proper scene designer and then is able to get from them what he wants.

Last night at the Playhouse Traube, who put together the memorable "Angel Street," offered an enjoyably dreadful evening with London's Jack the Ripper under the title of "The Stranger."

This play has suspense, but it depends more upon atmosphere. It has plot, but it escapes the ordinary whodunit class by trying to make its characters people. Its mystery is not too difficult to solve in advance, but it doesn't seem to care much whether you solve it or not. It is quiet, but bloody enough, and it is indeed a cheery sound when the constable leans out a window and calls "Mind you 'er 'ead doesn't drop off."

Leslie Reade, the British author, has written a tale of a stranger, a Russian cobbler, who comes to a revolutionary workers' club in Whitechapel in 1888. Here the cobbler meets, and the audience meets, interesting people—a Russky soap-box orator, a French emigre, a girl, a boy, a tart, a drunken old landlady with a gift of vision, a cop.

Who's the Ripper

The neighborhood is somewhat unrestful, for every once in a while some female gets her throat slit and everybody is sort of wondering who does these things. The story goes that the ripper is a gent who wears a leather apron and carries a black bag.

The cobbler answers this description. In his bag is a wicked sharp knife. And he is a very odd coot in the bargain. This is all that should be reported about the plot—and is practically the whole plot anyway. What makes "The Stranger" interesting is the way it is put upon the stage, and this is Capt. Traube's doing.

Boris Aronson has made and lighted a set which establishes a perfect mood before one word is spoken. In this set the characters take on the peculiar color necessary to melodrama—real enough to be convincing, yet unreal enough to be pleasant fiction.

The actors fit; they fit the story and they fit the set. As the stranger, Eduard Franz is ingratiating and frightening by turns. Eugene Sigaloff provides humor as a revolutionist, Perry Wilson is a properly pallid heroine, Wendy Atkins is a very good Whitechapel trollop and Eva Leonard-Boyne is the old landlady who thinks she can tell fortunes. The others of the company are equally well chosen.

"The Stranger" is not likely to cause you to wake up screaming in the middle of the night, for its pleasures are of a quiet sort but delicious nevertheless. The plot has some holes in it, as most melodrama scenarios do, and the denouement lacks the impact of the wonderful ending of "Angel Street." But it was, for me, the best evening with a homicidal maniac I have enjoyed this season.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
February 13, 1945

Purely Circumstantial

By HOWARD BARNES

TERROR and suspense are sadly lacking in "The Stranger." Circumlocution is substituted for melodramatic effect in the latest salute to that cut-up artist of the '80s known as Jack the Ripper. Jack gets on stage briefly at the Playhouse, but Leslie Reade seems to have been less interested in a London toff with pearls in one hand and a scalpel in the other than in the background of a radical club. The author has composed some fancy speeches about Marxists, nihilists and anarchists, but they add up to very little in a show which presumes to concern itself with the violent death and mutilation of sundry women.

There is a lot of finger-poking in the show, to be sure, which fixes suspicion on virtually every male member of the cast. The more the pity that Reade and his producer-director, Shepard Traube, did not contrive to keep the piece a bit on the murder mystery side. Instead, they have settled for a rather tedious biography of a Russian cobbler, who has escaped from a pogrom in his homeland only to escape from a hanging on circumstantial evidence through the right thinking of some good English folk.

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The scenery and lighting of Boris Aronson deserved far more excitement than is generated by the script. There is a sweetly sinister character to the London boarding house in which the action occurs. The stray inhabitants are not loath to damn the police. They are willing to risk their necks to keep innocent people from going to the gallows. With old man Marx's picture hanging over a tinny piano, the setting is all that it should be. Neither the play nor the acting fill the stage picture.

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Eugene Sigaloff plays the part of a refugee Muscovite rebel with some authority, and Perry Wilson and Wendy Atkin are particularly comely products of the London gutter who become involved in the fragmentary violence. Eduard Franz has the difficult assignment of trying to make believe that he is the murderer, and Stanley Bell is properly proficient as a police constable. They rarely convince one that homicide is lurking around the corner. What they do succeed in putting across the footlights is hard to take. "The Stranger" tries hard to be sinister, but it becomes befuddled in dated revolutionary talk.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
February 13, 1945

'The Stranger' Has Thrills But Just Doesn't Add Up

By BURTON RASCOE

"THE STRANGER," a Jack-the-Ripper mystery melodrama by Leslie Read, which Shepard Traube presented at the Playhouse last night, comes so close to being good that it is with the deepest regret that I cannot recommend it as a wholly satisfying evening's entertainment.

It has some fine characterizations. The acting, indeed, is so good that you almost wish the play didn't have a plot which has to be resolved. The setting designed and lighted by Boris Aronson, is an impressive achievement in scenic realism. There are one or two genuine thrills in the play. And the author is someone who doesn't condescend toward his audience but has a pretty decent respect for the playgoers' intelligence.

Yet the play doesn't add up. It doesn't come off. Frankly, I don't know why. I overheard people during the intermission saying it was a bore; but I didn't feel that way. Moreover, I noticed that nobody walked out on the show. When hard-boiled first-nighters are thoroughly bored, they walk out. They didn't last night—at least none that I saw. So their interest was held—like my own—until the final curtain.

Diverted from Theme

But do you know what I kept thinking, all the time the author wanted me to be interested in the identity of the maniac who was slitting throats of old and young women, offstage? I kept thinking that this was a wonderful setting and just the right characters for a stage adaptation of Gilbert K. Chesterton's hilarious satire on anarchists and on the sleuths set to trap them, "The Man Who Was Thursday."

There was Napoleon Mickalieff, beautifully played by Eugene Sigaloff, a man who acted so like an anarchist he might have been an agent from Scotland Yard set to spy on anarchists. There was the Frenchman, Jean Prunier, admirably played by Alfred Hesse, who was just the sort of expatriate Frenchman who might attach himself to a seedy but worthy group of political idealists in London, in 1888, with a wife he had neglected to marry and whose desertion of him he must—perforce, because his logic provided for that—take very philosophically.

We'll say that Stanley Bell was a bit young for a London bobby and that even the chinstrap of his helmet wasn't something he had got used to; but Mr. Bell was a very proper British constable, just the same, dropping his aitches and all—who is mindful not to interfere with a citizen's rights and who won't make a pinch until he is pretty sure he has enough evidence to make his charge stand up in court. . . . And there were the other denizens of the lodging house of Mrs. Gregory (Eva Leonard-Boyne) used by the anarchists for their meetings, the only members of which who never demeaned themselves by taking jobs were a coster-monger, a laundress and a prostitute—the others were above such petty bourgeois concerns.

Able Cast

And they were all so good! Eduard Franz (last seen here as the pathetically ineffectual intellectual in "The Cherry Orchard") has the part of a mentally deranged cobbler who is suspected of being Jack-the-Ripper; and, even if he has altogether too much oratory to deliver for a simple melodrama, he is, as always, believable. Perry Wilson as the girl who reposes in Mr. Franz's innocence—because he can play the piano as well as cobble shoes—is also quite effective in her part.

Isn't it too bad that, with all those fine players, the play wasn't about something else? Or, if it had to be a melodrama, why couldn't it have been disclosed, at the end, that Mr. Franz WAS Jack-the-Ripper after he had been declared innocent by the jury of his alleged peers? That other stuff about the real Jack-the-Ripper, which was the unhappy task of Morton L. Stevens to play, just made people in the audience laugh.

For the good points in this play and for the sake of the fine actors in it, I hope this melodrama pans out, but I don't think it will and I am sorry I can't recommend it, wholeheartedly, to you.

NEW YORK SUN
February 13, 1945

'The Stranger,' Another on Playhouse List, is Ambling and Very Clumsy

By WARD MOREHOUSE

SHEPARD TRAUBE is the showman who gave Broadway a distinguished thriller in "Angel Street," which stayed around for three years. Now Mr. Traube is back with another period piece but this time the magic isn't there. "The Stranger," presented last evening at the Playhouse, is a listless and dawdling play, badly constructed and ineptly written.

Leslie Reade, now in the British Army, wrote "The Stranger." Mr. Traube has again done the staging, but no amount of directorial skill could make or save this play. Only the setting, contributed by Boris Aronson, is up to the "Angel Street" standard.

The locale of Mr. Reade's play is London, in the year 1888. The Stranger is a spiritual young Russian, a musician and linguist, whose family was killed in a pogrom and who is a wanderer in England, plying his trade as a shoemaker. He wears a leather apron and carries a black bag and a large knife and is suspected of committing a series of Jack-the-Ripper murders in London's White Chapel district, the victim in each instance being a woman of the streets.

The evidence that is piled up against David Mendelsohn is so great that it is completely obvious to all students of chill and shudder drama, of which there were many in the Playhouse last night, that he couldn't possibly be the killer. Midway in the third act the identity of the maniacal throat-slasher is revealed, and that is no surprise, either.

"The Stranger" rambles a great deal. A lot of it is concerned with the general philosophy of the members of the International Workmen's Educational Club, into whose quarters David wanders in quest of friendship and a kindly word. The acting is passable.

The role of the Stranger, which occasionally bears touches of the "Passing of the Third Floor Back" influence, becomes somewhat monotonous as done by Eduard Franz, who is generally an actor I enjoy watching. Perry Wilson does nicely as Christina, who believed in David's innocence and tried to stand by him. Wendy Atkin gets a characterization into the part of the trollop, Maggie MacAndrews. Eva Leonard-Boyne is the frowsy Mrs. Gregory. Eugene Sigaloff holds fort fluently, if not particularly clearly, at the sessions of the worker's club.

Boris Aronson, besides designing an atmospheric setting, has done a good job with the lighting, and so has Rose Bogdanoff in the supervision of the costumes, vintage 1888.

Shepard Traube won the community's cheers for his "Angel Street" production. He has missed with this new piece. "The Stranger" is ambling and very clumsy.

Here it is mid-February and the Playhouse is still looking for a play.

NEW YORK POST
February 13, 1945

Traube Tries Again But Finds No 'Angel Street'

By WILELLA WALDORF

SHEPARD TRAUBE, the man who produced "Angel Street," staged another Victorian thriller at the Playhouse last night that is obviously designed for the same eager audiences that kept Patrick Hamilton's drama on Broadway for three years.

Unfortunately, Leslie Reade's "The Stranger" is not only no "Angel Street"; it is not even a particularly good Jack-the-Ripper melodrama. "Hand in Glove," which had a short ru here earlier this season, treated the same theme less clumsily and was far more successful at inducing flesh-creeping in the audience.

Mr. Traube has given this new production his careful attention as a director, and Boris Aronson has supplied an atmospheric setting with some of the dipping gas-light effects that proved so terrifying in "Angel Street."

But "The Stranger" never manages to achieve more than the mildest sort of suspense, and the chief suspect is so elaborately plotted against that it is evident from the first that he is innocent of anything but extreme egotism and a childlike stupidity that is very convenient for the author.

Mr. Reade is so busy piling up evidence against David Mendelsohn, the shoemaker who wears a leather apron, carries a knife and occasionally suffers from sudden headaches, that he is only casually interested in finding out who actually is committing all the Whitechapel murders (circa 1888), and he is almost, though not quite, guilty of the heinous sin of finally introducing as the killer a gentleman who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation.

He does not actually drag in somebody out of a London fog to take the rap when the evidence collapses against poor Mendelsohn, but he does the next thing to it, leaving enough red herrings strewn around the stage to stock a fish market.

And so, despite Mr. Traube's earnest efforts as a director and the often very effective playing of Miss Perry Wilson and Eduard Franz, "The Stranger" proves a very synthetic thriller. Elementary, my dear Watson, elementary.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
February 13, 1945

'The Stranger' Bows On Playhouse Stage

By ROBERT GARLAND

THERE'S still another young hopeful at the play-by-Playhouse. I don't know just how many young hopefuls have been there this season. Enough, I warrant! The new one is "The Stranger," a mild whodunit by one Leslie Reade.

Shepard Traube, angel of "Angel Street," produced it. And staged it, too. But, in spite of all the time and trouble that have been lavished on it, "The Stranger" never quite comes off as a thriller-diller. Why? Because it's difficult to get yourself all worked up over a mess of offstage murders. It's difficult for me, at any rate.

All the killings in last night's arrival in 48th st. happen just around the corner of Boris Aronson's handsome London setting. And all the victims are people you neither care nor have heard about. Strangers!

Then, again, the man you're supposed to pick out as the murderer—and who, as goes without saying, isn't — is framed by both playwright and director. Up to the very end! Card after card, which, at the Playhouse, is scene after scene, is stacked against him. The only reason he isn't guilty is because the author says he isn't. I don't believe it.

"The Stranger" is the trickiest sort of playwriting, with every accusing finger pointing deliberately at the wrong fellow. In fact, the wrong fellow persistently points an accusing finger at himself.

Tower of Babel

Be all this as it may, Mr. Traube's latest attempt at hair-raising gets under way in the meeting room of the International Workmen's Educational Club. The place, as I have said, is London. The year is 1888.

There's a good deal of walkie-talkie conversation on the parts of Napoleon Mickaleff, Jean Prunier and Bill Humphreys. Napoleon speaks phoney cockney with a phoney French accent. Jean speaks phoney cockney with a phoney Russian accent. And Bill just speaks phoney cockney. It's a bit like the tower of Babel. And tough to catch on to.

However, listening carefully, you begin to gather that Jack the Ripper is on the loose, slitting the throats of females—but only females of doubtful reputation. And while doing so, enjoying himself tremendously.

Rumor around Whitechapel where, quite obviously, the piece is laid, insists that the killer is a young man, a refugee, wearing a leather apron and carrying a small black bag. This having been established, in comes our hero wearing a leather apron and carrying a small black bag. His name is David Mendelsohn—and who else could be the killer?

David Did It

Even if he isn't, Eduard Franz acts as if he were. He acts and acts and acts as if he were. Upstage and downstage he plays the guilty party. Having cleared David of all guilt, I'm sure the author is mistaken.

Perry Wilson, an acknowledged graduate of Tamara Daykarkanova's school for embryo actresses, deals deliberately with Christina Thomson, the little London lady who passes for our heroine. She believes in David a whole lot more than I do. And, at the final curtain, she is more than welcome to him. But he, in turn, passes her on to Mr. Humphreys.

Stanley Bell is personable as Police Constable Hood. Kim Spalding, a refugee from "Catherine Was Great," is a believable Bill Humphreys. Eva Leonard-Boyne, as the fortune-telling Mrs. Gregory, should be set to music . . .

The best part of "The Stranger" happens offstage. It lets you hear about its horrors without permitting you to see them. And, as you have realized, it befuddles you unfairly about who does the killings.

Frankly, here in this final paragraph, I'm still sure it's the playwright, not the playgoer, who is mistaken. Mr. Innocent is still Mr. Guilty as far as I'm concerned. David did it. Don't you let them fool you.

Now Available Motion Picture Critic's Reviews

"One-Man Show"

Play by Ruth Goodman and Augustus Goetz; staging by Jed Harris; setting designed by Stewart Chaney; presented by Jed Harris at the Barrymore Theater Thursday, February 8, 1945.

THE CAST

Lucian Gardner	Frank Conroy
A Woman	Elizabeth Brew
Tom	Mitchell Harris
James Dockerel	Hugh Franklin
Racine Gardner	Constance Cummings
Emory Jelliffe	James Rennie
Blanche	Kasia Orzazewski
Francis Kearny	John Archer

THE NEW YORK TIMES
February 9, 1945

'One-Man Show'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

PERHAPS the simplest way to put it is to say the pictures of "One-Man Show" are not hung quite straight. The ingredients of an excellent evening in the theatre are there. The play, by Ruth Goodman and Augustus Goetz, has an idea, and the writing is generally concise and easy. Jed Harris has given it an honest production. The fact is however, that the evening remains simply one of ingredients; the good qualities are not merged together. Instead of fulfilling its promise, the play ends by only suggesting how much better it might have been, and the whole thing sums up to a disappointment.

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The authors are speaking of a man's relationship with his daughter — the silver-cord theme in reverse. He owns a gallery, and she helps him run it. A young artist who exhibits there wishes to marry her, a wealthy attorney who has met her wishes her for purposes aside from matrimony. Finally a youthful member of the State Department comes along, and he recognizes the father-daughter relationship and in telling her about it causes her to fall in love with himself. She agrees to leave the father and the gallery and go with him to Costa Rica, presumably being cured of what the psychiatrists would call the fixation.

The authors' chief misfortune is the inability to blend the serious and the lighter sides of their play. They have written bits of excellent light dialogue, and some of the serious moments could be touching. The effect as they are put together, however, is that of turning on alternate hot and cold water, each canceling out much of the good of the other. The characters do not always have sufficient motivation, some of their thought processes being unlikely, to say the least. Most of the characters of "One-Man Show" appear to believe implicity everything that is told them; that makes for the mechanical conclusions to plays, if not for truth.

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Constance Cummings, recently returned from England, is the daughter, and her interpretation of the part suffers from the same defects as the play. She is extremely good in the lighter moments, she overdoes some of the serious passages. She cannot quite get across the idea that the daughter could have an attachment for her father, be willing to live with a man if he will build an American museum, and fall in love with another man, all in an evening. But the authors could not get that across either.

Frank Conroy is the father, giving a solid performance for the most part, but, like Miss Cummings, not being speedy enough to catch all the abrupt changes. James Rennie is the wealthy lawyer, and John Archer is easy and winning as the young State Department representative. Hugh Franklin is the artist, a painter right down to the baggy trousers. Mr. Harris' direction is filled with the realistic little touches that are Mr. Harris' direction, and Stewart Chaney has designed a nice setting of the gallery. There is a lot of willingness all around, but not a good enough result.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
February 9, 1945

Father-Daughter Fixation

By HOWARD BARNES

A DELICATE theme is given somewhat rugged treatment in "One-Man Show." For all of Jed Harris's taut direction and a deal of over-taut acting, the new play at the Ethel Barrymore Theater is far from subtle. The authors have composed some literate passages in their investigation into a father-daughter fixation. They have not tied them together in a very satisfying dramatic continuity. It was a matter of relief rather than revelation when a young alcoholic snatched the heroine from an art gallery in the final act.

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It is not that Ruth Goodman and Augustus Goetz have lacked subject matter. For a time, last evening, their work took on the provacative outlines of Greek tragedy. The necessity of punctuating a discussion about art and tangled human relationships with some sort of plot is what makes "One-Man Show" disappointing. Neither suspense nor urgency is evident in the over-all blueprint of the piece. Without them the show is pretentious rather than profound; blunt where it might have been keen-edged.

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The best parts of the offering are incidental to the main action. There are fugitive glimpses of real and whole characters, as a dynamic art dealer copes with a group of artists and patrons, using his daughter as both spear and shield. They frequently promise to resolve into those moments of recollected human experience which the stage knows how to flourish. Unfortunately, the resolutions are fortitous to a point where the players are left gesturing, with little of any significance to communicate.

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Constance Cummings is attractive and rather resourceful as the daughter who is willing to bargain her happiness to attain her father's dream. Too often, she appears to be enacting a sleep-walking scene, in which she is certain to wake up in the arms of the right fellow. John Archer is right enough as the fellow and James Rennie does a quick turn as the wealthy patron whose interest in painting is centered in a young woman who is selling art in a big way. Frank Conroy has the role of the father and he does not obviate the difficulty of the part. The Harris direction and Stewart Chaney's setting do what they can to make "One-Man Show" a probing and fascinating drama, but it rarely becomes one.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
February 9, 1945

'One-Man Show' Splendidly Acted Example of Theatre at Its Best

By JOHN CHAPMAN

JED HARRIS' production of "One-Man Show" is the theatre as it should be: intelligent, provocative of more than surface interest, well written, and so smoothly, so seemingly effortlessly put upon the stage as to make one forget that actors and a director have been involved in it.

It is not a dramatic wow, praise be. It strains no lungs, sprains no muscles, makes no effort whatever. It is just a story about people—but the story is absorbing and its people are real, and when it is over one leaves the Barrymore Theatre hesitantly, wishing that somehow one could stick around a while longer just in case something else should happen.

The authors, Ruth Goodman and Augustus Goetz, tell of a father and his daughter who run an art dealers' gallery. They have been together for always, these two, and their attachment for each other is profound. Too profound, the father sometimes reasons.

In a moment of clear thinking he decides to leave the gallery—leave it in charge of his daughter and make her fend for herself; fend for herself more in a spiritual sense than in a business way. She should learn that somewhere there must be some other reason for devotion than himself.

The Tables Turned

And she does. Once she makes a mistake, offering herself to a wealthy man simply because he can afford something her father has always dreamed of—a museum of American art. Then she finds love—a love all her own which she cannot and must not share with anybody. When this happens it is a greater blow to the father than he had counted upon. Now it is he who must make the adjustment; he who must fend for himself.

The performances are invariably, admirably right. Frank Conroy as the father and Constance Cummings as the daughter give their roles every advantage an intelligent actor can bestow—charm, sureness and perception. James Rennie, as the millionaire; Hugh Franklin, as a gloomy and mixed-up painter, and John Archer, as the man who introduces Miss Cummings to love, are no less worthy of approbation.

Miss Goodman and Mr. Goetz have written their play with quiet authority, never stressing its Freudian implications and always trying to make it a drama about understandable and interesting people. And Mr. Harris' direction is quite splendid because it never seems like direction at all; it never imposes itself upon the play.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
February 9, 1945

'One-Man Show' Is Season's First Serious Drama

By BURTON RASCOE

THIS has been a brilliant theatrical season, probably the most notable one in 25 years, in the richness and variety of its entertainments. But not until Jed Harris brought "One-Man Show," by Ruth Goodman and Augustus Goetz, to the Ethel Barrymore last night could we boast of having a drama, in the best sense of that word, on Broadway.

We had almost, I suppose, forgotten that drama existed, in our deep pleasure over comedies, fantasies, sentimental evocations of our remembrances of things past, melodramas, farces, operettas and spectacles, with or without music. Mr. Harris has reminded us that there is a place in the theater, also, for drama in the Aristotelian sense, as a catharsis of our emotions of pity and terror, by a representation on the stage of the causes of pity and terror—and that drama can be not only emotionally very compelling and instructive, but, in its own way, profoundly entertaining.

Father Worship

"One-Man Show" is as fascinatingly abhorrent as some of the most disturbing chapters in the "Sodome et Gomorrhe" sections of Marcel Proust's sensitive and lyrical entomology of the curious human insects of the Faubourg Saint Germain in Paris; and yet it depicts a phenomenon of human behavior so common that you have seen innumerable examples of it and may yourself be, in some slight degree, a victim of the aberration.

The "Silver Cord" theme of the physically adult man still tied emotionally to his mother's apron strings has been rather overdone in the theater. But its companion theme, that of the physically adult woman who is kept abnormally immature by her adoration of her father, is something rather new in the theater. "One-Man Show" is not only a drama of a daughter's emotionally unhealthy devotion to her father but of the subtle, devious and

sinister manner in which the father kept her, until she was 26 years old, from enjoying a normal emotional life.

The drama tells the story of Racine Gardner (Constance Cummings), whose mother (unloved by her father) died when she was very young, and who, from the time she was 16, was trained by her father in the art-agency business and made a partner in the discovery and exploitation of new artists to the artists' financial benefit (and his own) among collectors long on cash but short on appreciation of aesthetic values—in short, to vanity-buyers, to whom a painting is valuable only because it costs a lot of money.

Held on Daughter

Lucien Gardner (Frank Conroy), the father, is brilliant, attractive, shrewd, percipient and successful; and he has never allowed his daughter to think otherwise for a moment, for he has taken care that she shall have no opinions except those he has instilled in her and no attachments for anybody except him. He has dealt with one lad, an artist, whom she expected to marry, by the simple device of "adopting" the chap and thus establishing a sort of brother-sister relationship between them which killed the love impulse.

How Racine is finally freed of the incubus of her father's pathological domination of her is the tensely thrilling story of "One-Man Show." There are some flaws in the play, particularly in the author's conception of the character of the millionaire played by James Rennie, and there are moments in the last act which call upon every rich resource of that very fine precisionist, Mr. Conroy, to sustain the dramatic force of some weak spots.

But, all in all, this is a brilliant and distinctive contribution to modern drama, subtle, psychologically incisive and deeply moving. Mr. Harris has cast and directed this play with that care and skill which made him famous.

NEW YORK SUN
February 9, 1945

Jed Harris Offers Some Expert Theater in 'One-Man Show,' at Barrymore

By WARD MOREHOUSE

JED HARRIS, a master of the drama from time to time, is back in the theatrical business with a skillful production of an interesting play. "One-Man Show" it is called, the work of Ruth Goodman and her husband, Augustus Goetz, and it was offered last evening at the Barrymore.

These new playwrights present a study in domination—a possessive father's domination of his intelligent and attractive daughter, and they have brought forth a play that falters occasionally and that doesn't live up to the promise of its first act, but one that also holds your attention steadily throughout the evening.

The authors have been intentionally misleading in that there are implications that the relationship between Lucian and Racine Gardner goes beyond a father-daughter attachment and the suggestion of incest is given in the writing, direction and manner of playing. But at the play's finish it leaves you with no such impression.

"One-Man Show" might be subtitled "Racine and the Four Men in Her Life." The girl and her father are successful partners in the operation of a small art gallery, and it has been his dream to have an art museum of his own. Her life has been one of complete dependence on his decisions and judgments and so it is when she is sought by three men. An artist wants to marry her but his status, because of the father's methods and his influence upon the girl, has become that of a brother. An enormously wealthy lawyer, whose hobbies are art and women, becomes interested and offers to finance the coveted museum in exchange for Racine. And a strong-minded and romantic young man offers her marriage and liberation from the mental and emotional hold that her father has upon her—and she takes him up, and on his own terms.

There is some sharp writing in "One-Man Show." Jed Harris has given the play adroit direction and the acting, except in moments when it gets somewhat out of control, is first-rate.

Constance Cummings, back to Broadway after several years in England, is the girl with the father fixation and she looks wonderfully well. Except for her big second-act scene, in which she loses all restraint, she gives a performance of extraordinary skill and variety. Frank Conroy brings some of his expert playing to his characterization of the father.

John Archer is tremendously direct and believable as the young man who talks straight to the girl—and then takes her out of her father's home and out of his life. James Rennie is bland and effective as the rich art patron. And there are good performances by Hugh Franklin and Mitchell Harris.

"One-Man Show" doesn't hold together all the way, but there is never a moment when you are not listening to it. If Mr. Harris is not offering us a tremendously impressive play he is at least giving us some expert theater, which is welcome.

NEW YORK POST
February 9, 1945

'One-Man Show' at the Barrymore an Absorbing Psychological Drama

BY JAMES ARONSON

THE 1945 theatre season achieved full maturity last night when Jed Harris presented "One Man Show" at the Barrymore. This comedy by Ruth Goodman and Augustus Goetz is an absorbing, intelligent and adult psychological drama, expertly played and skillfully directed.

The story is the Electra story, varied by an unusual twist. In the middle is Lucian Gardner, who runs a gallery with his capable daughter, Racine. One man, James Dockerel, a painter, is already in their lives, and two more come in — Emory Jelliffe, who collects paintings and women, and his friend, Francis Kearney, a nice guy who works for the State Dept. in Costa Rica, who used to collect bottles —full ones.

Suspense to the End

It reads like three men and a girl, but it's really four, because of the unnatural relationship between father and daughter. But further than that it wouldn't be fair to tell the story, which has suspense that carries to the very end. If you are an acute analyst, you'll capture the key early. If you don't it's even more exciting.

The action is mostly mental, but you can feel the sparks fly. The dialogue is crisp and sharp and rarely slips. Some of the talk is about art and art galleries, but it's never arty. I found this part of the conversation most illuminating. If ever I have enough money to buy a good original, I will bear in mind that a pretty painting saleslady is allowed to add a couple of hundred to the price, just on her looks.

It's hard to single out any one actor's performance as the best, but I think I liked Frank Conroy's beautifully restrained Lucian Gardner most.

Constance Cummings, newly home from England, played the daughter with a real understanding of a tortured mind. She was extremely handsome in several attractive Valentina gowns that blended perfectly with the rose-gray furniture. Even I could see that.

I liked John Archer as Kearney and James Rennie as Jelliffe, and Hugh Franklin made the humorless, tense painter come to life.

Most private art galleries usually make me feel as though I'm walking into the foyer of a fancy funeral parlor. But I think I would have got along in the Gardner place. Maybe that's because of Jed Harris' staging and the attractive people in the cast. At any rate, next time I'm in 57th St., I'll be a wiser man about paintings—and people, too.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
February 9, 1945

Constance Cummings in 'One-Man Show'

By ROBERT GARLAND

THANKS to Jed Harris and the fascinating fable he has brought into the Ethel Barrymore, this good theatrical season is itself again. Better! "One-Man Show" is the most admirable sort of adult entertaining.

Ruth Goodman and her husband, Augustus Goetz, hitherto unheard of as far as I'm concerned, have brought forth a tricky triangle made up of daughter, father, boy-friend. The Greeks had a word for it, as every student knows.

But the modern theatre has been prone to shy away from this strange relationship, although there are those who insist, quite casually, that it's not too tremendously unusual.

Anyway, Mr. Harris's new-found playwrights have chosen an absorbing and provocative theme. And they handle it with taste and understanding, neither over nor understressing its underlying abnormalities.

I've small idea what kind of play "One-Man Show" would be without the guiding hand of Jed Harris, its producer-director. With him, it's a memorable event in the modern showshop, an evening of sheer delight in which playwrights, players and producer, working harmoniously together, bring forth magic of make-believe, which is the theatre's most ancient and honorable possession.

Yes or No? Well—

The question about "One-Man Show" is just how normal or abnormal is the relationship between Lucian Gardner, the father, and Racine Gardner, the daughter. Certainly that relationship is a deep one.

Father and daughter have lived together, thought together, worked together for all of Racine's 26 years. The Gardner Gallery, here in New York City, is their offspring. They've made it what it is today, but they're not satisfied. What they crave is a Museum of Modern Art of their very own where the best of American painting can be seen by all and sundry under the best possible conditions.

Racine goes out to get it. She goes out to get it from Emory Jelliffe, a rich young man-about-town whose love of art is merely a practical step toward his love of women. A wolf in oil-painted clothing!

This leads to mental, moral and physical complications. Some of them are baffling, I must say. But none of them is boring. As a three-some turns into a four-some, a foursome turns into a five-some up on the lighted stage, action clashes with implication, normality with abnormality. The silver cord binding father and daughter, a quarter of a century strong, is difficult to break. Will it snap? Or won't it?

Cheers for Connie

Wait and see! Meantime, may I tell you that "One-Man Show" has a perfect cast, working perfectly together under Jed Harris's perfect direction? It's hard to see how any performance could be bettered.

Constance Cummings, newly home after several years in England, is ideal as Racine, acting with intensity, clarity and skill. She is lovely to look at, too, with gowns by Valentina, lingerie by Elizabeth Arden and jewelry by Coro. What is more, her voice is a joy to the ear; just as her appearance is a joy to the eye and her histrionics are a joy to the mind. Miss Cummings is certainly welcome home.

Admirable, also, are Frank Conroy as the is-he-or-isn't-he father, James Rennie as the Emory Jelliffe who loves art for women's sake and John Archer who, as Francis Kearney, has a winning way with him.

If you ask me—even if you don't—Jed Harris has returned to Broadway with a winner. I don't always understand the people who walk and talk and have their being at the Ethel Barrymore. For that matter, I don't always understand myself. But the inhabitants of "One-Man Show" are alive and interesting, vivid, vital and completely in the round. Frankly, I'd like to know them better. And I'm going to.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
February 9, 1945

Freud, Art and Trickery

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ON several scores *One Man Show* is two or three cuts above the average Broadway play. It is intelligent; it has its share of sharp and pointed dialogue; some of it is undoubtedly clever; it has moments of hard-hitting theater. But just because of these qualities the play as a whole is miserably disappointing — and even something worse than that. It seems to me needlessly hollow and shamelessly specious. And this is not just because it goes in for melodramatic touches and misleading tricks. Such maneuvers are blood and bone of a certain type of "theater." But surely not of a play whose leisurely and rather civilized first act is pitched in a quiet key and seems endowed with really serious intentions. Hence what happens thereafter, though it may have its catch-penny uses, is artistically a betrayal and dramatically a botch.

One Man Show concerns a father and daughter who run an art gallery. The girl is very attractive and draws suitors as honey does flies. But she will have none of them because, we are soon enough shown, she is passionately, indeed pathologically, attached to her father. Quite aware of this the father tries to put her on her own. But the girl remains obsessed and unhappy; she even agrees to becoming a rich lawyer's mistress in return for his founding the museum that has been her father's dream and that will reunite her with him. But, seeing through the bargain, the father sternly rejects it.

Then, quite suddenly, the girl finds herself very much in love—with another and more attractive suitor. In view of her previous behavior, this just won't wash. But . . . well, not to give away the plot (because by now the plot is the only thing that matters), I will merely say that the authors have been keeping something up their sleeve. Not too well hidden, perhaps; but in view of the apparent seriousness of their theme, you brushed aside the notion that it was there. You assumed the play was not that shoddy.

In any case, once the play takes its tricky turn, a great deal that went before—which even at the time seemed unpleasant and overdone and *emotionally* unconvincing is seen to have been *psychologically* incredible. To make a third act, *One Man Show* blandly turns Freud into fraud.

Even so, I don't think *One Man Show* gets what it goes after. There is too great a gap between its melodrama and its quiet and "sophisticated" side: so that the melodrama seems all the more lurid. For the same reason, the play keeps changing pace. And I found the girl too unsympathetic for a character that was also unreal.

Jed Harris has brought together a pretty good cast for the play, and—barring its more theatrical moments—has given it good direction. As the girl, Constance Cummings gives a divided performance: in her quieter moods she is extremely effective, but in her violent ones she is stagy and irritating. Frank Conroy plays the father, as he is meant to, with a certain cold authority. John Archer has force and naturalness as the successful suitor, and James Rennie does well enough in the ungrateful role of the rich man. Stewart Chaney's art-gallery set is right and handsome.

"Hope for the Best"

Play by William McCleery; staging by Marc Connelly; setting designed by Motley; presented by Jean Dalrymple and Marc Connelly at the Fulton Theater Wednesday, February 7, 1945.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
February 8, 1945

'Hope for the Best' Argues Need for Another Columnist, God Forbid

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IN "Hope for the Best" William McCleery is bemused by the pious but debatable notion that what this country needs is one more syndicated columnist writing about politics. Since he failed last night to persuade me that Franchot Tone is the man to fill the void in my aching mind, I found that his play was more soap-box than stage, more debate than dramaturgy. Nor could I quite bring myself to believe that the presence of the lovely Jane Wyatt could inspire Mr. Tone to the merely secondary pursuit of typing a daily piece about world affairs.

Mr. McCleery, a working newspaperman, has imagined that Mr. Tone is a cross between the early Westbrook Pegler and the late Dr. Frank Crane, and that he has eleven million readers who dote on his homey and unimportant stuff.

A professor who is arbitrarily endowed with profundity (played by Leo Bulgakov) and a little later Miss Wyatt herself try to persuade Mr. Tone that he is just the guy to teach thinking to the masses. Mr. Tone is interested—but leery and modest, for he used to be a sports columnist and aw, shucks, what did a sports columnist ever know about Problems.

Natural Shop-Talk

Aside from his own self-deprecation, he is held back from being a boon to mankind by a fiancee, or mistress, who is herself a syndicated columnist on Whither Is the World Whithering. She is described as half sweetness and half acid, but I think Mr. McCleery thinks she is a fascist. She is very well played by Joan Wetmore.

Being a newspaperman, Mr. McCleery makes most of his shop-talk sound natural. Writers, says Doro Merande, the maid in Mr. Tone's Connecticut house, are like hens: when they're sitting you don't know whether they're producing or just sitting.

However, there is quite a lot of oratory along with the shop-talk and I got tired of it, even though the players, under the direction of Marc Connelly, were as interesting as possible under the circumstances.

Miss Wyatt, as I indicated, is charming.

THE CAST

Howard Hilton	Jack Hartley
Mrs. Bassett	Doro Merande
Margaret Hicks Harwood	Joan Wetmore
Professor Wechsler	Leo Bulgakov
Sgt. Joe Jordan	Paul Potter
Lucille Daly	Jane Wyatt
Michael Jordan	Franchot Tone

Mr. Tone performs with a reckless simplicity which is somewhat astonishing, in view of the fact that he is supposed to be a former sports writer. Paul Potter contributes some amusing human interludes in the role of a visiting soldier, and last night Jack Hartley, as a syndicate manager, was frequently a syllable behind his lines.

The production is by Jean Dalrymple and Mr. Connelly, and Mr. Tone's house was built by Motley.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
February 8, 1945

"Hope Springs Eternal"

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

POLITICAL ideologies have been well considered but loosely organized into a play at the Fulton. "Hope for the Best," the new comedy by William McCleery, is a thoughtful series of anecdotes about a columnist who wants to write political copy instead of amusing fluff. Its thesis of democracy has been set down in excellent style in many provoking passages, but they do not build up into dramatic form. "Hope for the Best" is a recitation rather than a dramatization of the author's thoughts, and it is not comfortable in its theatrical show-case.

Franchot Tone is the syndicated columnist of 11,000,000 readers whose heart is still in his small Indiana home town. On a week end in Connecticut he is surrounded by many people who are pulling his mind every which way. There is his fiancee, a political columnist herself, who wants him to keep up his old style, and his employer is on her side. But an old professor, a young girl who works in a factory and the columnist's kid brother in the service want him to go on to better things. This conflict gathers and is resolved in a series of conversation pieces between pairs of characters. Most of them are interesting, but together they gather very little theatrical momentum. The thought is there, but the impetus is lacking to set "Hope for the Best" into action.

The author has the play's professor inventing a device known as a "dramagram," which is supposed to be a visual representation of an idea, for use in television. When the columnist wants to explain how a man's bad influence can affect others, he sets up sticks of wood in a line so that one toppling over will push them all down, one against the other. Two of the play's ideas are visually dramatized in these "dramagrams." But when the columnist is recounting tales of his boyhood to the factory girl, or discussing his problems with the other characters, the play is talked rather than acted. The play itself should be one long "dramagram"; but its movement is limited to occasional bits of action, notably a pantomime of the columnist alone on the stage sweating to give birth to some prose out of his typewriter at the end of Act II.

Franchot Tone's performance as the columnist is smooth and likeable, and Jane Wyatt plays the intelligent, eager young worker who wants him to try for higher journalistic efforts. Doro Merande is around to contribute her special brand of humor in another of those dryly sarcastic down-Eastern servant parts, and Joan Wetmore is insidiously reactionary as the political writer who wants the columnist to continue on his old plane. Jean Dalrymple and Marc Connelly have set their production up in a modernistic interior setting by Motley; and though some of the performances and Mr. Connelly's staging still have rough edges, they undoubtedly will be polished off. "Hope for the Best" is a manuscript in which a writer might take considerable pride, but it faces the same problem as its central character: how to set down creditable ideas so they will come to life for the public. The ideas are there in "Hope for the Best," but the columnist works out this problem more easily than the play.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
February 8, 1945

'Hope for the Best' — You're Due for the Worst

By BURTON RASCOE

IN spite of its two Hollywood stars—Franchot Tone and Jane Wyatt—and a notable supporting cast, I am afraid "Hope For the Best" can't.

It is the talkiest play in several seasons,

with one of the silliest themes (and most fallaciously argued) ever propounded for adult consumption.

At the Fulton, where "Hope for the Best" opened last night, I had the discomforting illusion that I was back in one of those things inexplicably called a "bull session," in which high school sophomores, circa 1910, discussed the meaning and purpose of life and what to do about it.

At that, I think, as wet-behind-the-ears as our symposia were in those days, they were never as ridiculous as the principal argument in "Hope for the Best." For, never, I swear, did any one of us offer it as a proposition that a highly successful writer of sentimental drivel could become a highly successful writer of potent and penetrant revolutionary political articles of great social value—much less maintain that one could turn the trick overnight—through the love and understanding of a good woman. We weren't that callow.

Story of Columnist

That's the argument of William McCleery's play, which Jean Dalrymple and Marc Connelly have produced and Mr. Connelly has directed. Mr. Tone plays the part of Michael Jordan, a syndicated columnist whose stuff about sunsets and the joys of simple living (written in a country house apparently the size of the Westchester-Biltmore, from the number of guests it can accommodate) is read by 11,000,000 devoted fans. He is engaged to and dominated by a divorcee (Joan Wetmore) who is also a widely syndicated columnist, whose stuff is very highbrow—until a young factory worker (Jane Wyatt) convinces him overnight that he should marry her and turn his talents to editorials in the Daily Worker vein. What's more, his syndicate manager is right there, and agrees to all this.

And what is this jerk, who speaks of himself as "reborn" and talks about his "muses" and "inspiration," going to write about for the next morning's papers? He is going to write about the "Worlds Within the World," in which he is going to show that "inside the world is the USA, and inside the USA is the community, and inside the community is every citizen with a responsibility for keeping the politicians in line and making a better world." . . . So what? . . . So, as Mr. Tone tells it (and I give you my word, I'm not making this up) "every citizen is to go from house to house ringing doorbells!" . . . For what? To "show his political consciousness and to exercise his citizenship!" . . . I have left word with the doorman downstairs to tell Mr. Tone and Mr. McCleery if they come to ring my doorbell, that I am out ringing doorbells to express my political consciousness.

The direction in this play is as inept as the script, apparently making Mr. Tone very unhappy. Miss Wyatt is a very lovely girl, but if she can act, nowadays, except for the movie camera, she gave no evidence of it last night. Doro Merande and Paul Potter were the only ones who escaped the awful blight of the direction; it made a cold wraith of Miss Wetmore and afflicted Mr. Bulgakov with a species of amnesia.

I suppose I should be flattered that the principal comedy line of the play—one used intermittently throughout the three acts—is something I wrote many years ago, a statement which Dale Warren sets off, on a page by itself, in his book on the methods and habits of authors. It was: "Something no wife can ever understand, no matter if she lives with the man for 25 years, is that a writer is working when he is staring out of the window." That's a truism, but a play's whole comedy shouldn't reside in its reiteration. . . . Besides, Mr. McCleery has again demonstrated that a writer's private life is the dullest kind of theatrical material.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
February 8, 1945

Franchot Tone as a Columnist

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IT is not merely because the author of *Hope for the Best* is an editor of PM that I wish I could call it a satisfactory play. It is equally because some of its writing is amusing, and some of it forceful; it is perhaps most of all because Mr. McCleery is trying to speak for the responsibilities, in these days, of men of good will and for a right shaping of the future world.

But even with sound aims, and with writing gifts to clothe them in, Mr. McCleery has failed to write a viable or even particularly interesting play. He has just not breathed enough life into *Hope for the Best*; he has not achieved enough development, or even simple movement; he has not made his people very real, or his play *inwardly* expressive of anything. His difficulties lie partly in the type of play he has written — a type that has floored far more experienced playwrights than himself. For, despite some romantic and sexual frills, *Hope for the Best* is a play of ideas and talk. And for such a play to come off, the ideas must have as much vigor and color as personalities have in other plays, and the talk must do duty for action. Here both things are true only for brief intervals.

* * *

Mr. McCleery is concerned with a newspaper columnist who has been enormously successful writing pleasant nothings for the masses. But, alive now to the state of the world, he aches to write about politics, to preach democracy, to instill awareness and thought for the future into his huge common-man audience. His syndicate contract forbids him to write on controversial subjects; his snootily highbrow fiancee continually saps his confidence and weakens his resolve. But his old piano teacher, and a young girl who comes for the week end (and stays on for life) help give him courage, and at the end he is batting out a new kind of column under a new kind of contract.

This is at best a slender story thread; and one reason why it won't stretch far enough may be that the columnist's struggle is merely against external obstacles rather than something inside himself. He knows what he wants to do at the start quite as well as at the finish; inwardly he does not grow or change. And neither does anybody else. In this kind of play, the characters are very often mere personifications of different points of view; but though, being such, they need not alter in the course of the play, they should react upon one another more dramatically, more vibrantly, than they do here. In the life of the mind, no less than of the emotions, there should be some sort of electric charge, there should be something happening. In *Hope for the Best* there is no strong interplay; even the columnist, talking in advance to his readers, is in a sense talking out at the audience. That is neither good art nor good theater.

* * *

With the characters neither alive nor electrical, we are thrown back upon the talk merely as talk. Some of it has vigor, some of it has humor; but a good deal of it is repetitious and strained, and there is altogether too much of it. The general effect is of a static play that says its say too soon, and cannot keep going on the basis of minor variations and pleasant moments.

As the columnist Franchot Tone plays nicely enough, but too bloodlessly; he does not make you care about him as much as you should. Jane Wyatt is attractive, and more animated, as Tone's good angel; Joan Wetmore is attractive, and a bit boxed by too obvious a role, as this bad one. As a comic maid with some good lines, Doro Merande (as usual) makes the most of them. The Motley set is both serviceable and pleasant to look at.

NEW YORK SUN
February 8, 1945

'Hope for the Best' Provides a Somewhat Tiresome Connecticut Week End

By WARD MOREHOUSE

"HOPE FOR THE BEST," a first play by William McCleery, is a talky and negligible piece, given to a great deal of sermonizing. It was presented last night at the Fulton by Jean Dalrymple and Marc Connelly and brings forth Franchot Tone in the role of a columnist disturbed by the ills of democracy and the lack of expert citizenship in a troubled world.

There is some nice dialogue scattered through this comedy and here and there a scene is well played, but the high-purpose talk is frequently on the ponderous side. "Hope for the Best" does not provide an exhilarating or particularly interesting evening in the theater. It is not a very good play.

Mr. McCleery has fashioned, actually, a treatise on the fundamentals of democracy. A play with a message it definitely is. The columnist is the brooding and perplexed Michael Jordan, who turns out heart-interest pieces for an audience of 11,000,000 readers but who has yearnings to change his ways and give his writings weight and significance.

He is weary of writing of springtime in Indiana in a time of world upheaval. He wants to try his hand at political columns and his fiancee, a hard and snobbish woman, who is herself a syndicated political commentator, tries to talk him out of it. But into Michael's life comes an adoring and understanding girl, employed in a war plant. She speaks as a representative of his enormous public and urges him on with his crusading. Michael, finally upheld by his syndicate boss, breaks with his fiancee and is free to write and write of the cures of democracy and the common man's approach to world problems—and with the dream girl just on the other side of the typewriter.

The play is talk, talk, and more talk. And despite it, and perhaps to some extent because of it, the people of Mr. McCleery's play are never quite convincing. I found it difficult to believe in Michael Jordan, with the woes of the world on his mind, and do not feel that Franchot Tone, for all his easy under-playing, is more than moderately successful in his projection of the character. But Michael Jordan, as written, does not seem to be the man who can set democracy right.

The production is excellent; the Motley design for a Connecticut living room is first-rate. The cast assembled at the Fulton is generally all right. Jane Wyatt, co-starred with Franchot Tone, is very appealing as the girl who bolsters Michael's faith in himself. Joan Wetmore struggles with the unpleasant role of Michael's competitive columnist. Doro Merande, with her dry, wry comedy and her darting glances, is a joy, and gives a lift to the play in all her scenes. Leo Bulgakov is rather lost as the eccentric professor whose dramograms, blocks of wood and globes, illustrate Michael's ideals and ideas—but do little for the play. Paul Peter is likable as Michael's soldier brother and Jack Hartley gets some life into the role of the man who runs the syndicate.

Jean Dalrymple makes her debut in the producing field with "Hope for the Best." She believed in the script, bought it, and finally came in on the direction. She will, I'm sure, do dozens of plays, and Mr. McCleery will write a better one than that presented last night at the Fulton.

"Hope for the Best" has some nice moments but it must be put down as a conversation piece that turns out to be a rather tiresome week end in Connecticut.

NEW YORK POST
February 8, 1945

'Hope for the Best' at the Fulton Proves Love and Politics Do Mix

By JAMES ARONSON

LAST night at the Fulton Theatre, Jean Dalrymple and Marc Connelly presented "Hope for the Best," by William McCleery, and demonstrated that there is more good comedy to be found in our sad world than in the never-never-land investigated by too many modern playwrights.

Not that "Hope for the Best" found all that good comedy. It is a pleasant little play,

done with wit, humor and virtue, but lacking in firm dramatic structure and a real punch to get its ideas across.

The play's thesis is that "apathy is the mother of corruption," and that political understanding by the common man is the healthiest way to fight it. The idea is not original today, nor is McCleery's play an especially penetrating one, but you'd be surprised how refreshing it seems after some of the junk that has been peddled on Broadway lately. And few will deny that the thesis can stand repetition.

Whimsey vs. the World

The author, a newspaper man himself, makes the central figure a columnist who feeds warm, human whimsey to 11,000,000 readers. But he loves people so much that he wants to make them aware of the world and break a contract that forbids him to write politics. Lined up on his side are a girl newspaper reporter turned war worker; a piano teacher who rigs up Rube Goldbergian contraptions to demonstrate the world's ills, and a soldier.

The antagonists are his fiancee, a smart cynical, political columnist with a great contempt for people; a Connecticut native who expounds the Puritan theory that Moral Man is a creature who establishes his goodness by making enough money to buy a limousine; and a wavering syndicate manager who refuses to let political action stand in the way of his making an honest dollar.

That's a good setup, and most of the exchange is good too. McCleery is at his best in sharp give-and-take, and at his weakest when he lets his people get wound up in long preachments describing the life and times of Saroyaneesque characters in Nebraska and Indiana.

Franchot Tone did a fine job as the columnist who was trying to find his way. He never overplayed the role and made it entirely natural and believable. Miss Wyatt had too many sweetness-and-light lines and too many quotes about what mother said, but she handled them most gracefully. She looked extremely fresh and pretty too.

Joan Wetmore made the snobbish lady writer so real that she took a hissing in the last act. That's a pretty good tribute. Doro Merande was splendid as the nasty housekeeper. The role of the professor didn't give Leo Bulgakov much of a chance. It seemed to have been dropped into the play for convenience.

The setting by Motley was solid Connecticut farmhouse in the modern manner. "Like being pressed between the pages of House Beautiful," somebody in the play said.

NEW YORK TIMES
February 8, 1945

"Hope for the Best"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

BEING an editor, William McCleery is interested in the eternal vagaries of the writer, and being a liberal he is interested in the right-thinking way of the world. In his first drama, "Hope for the Best," he has approached both of these matters. Unfortunately for the good of the play, which opened at the Fulton last evening, he has not shown himself to be a fully polished writer for the theatre, and he apparently does not feel that the stage can be as liberal as himself. His play, as produced by Jean Dalrymple and Marc Connelly, is a stock affair that is somewhat tedious, occasionally a trifle foolish, mechanical and exasperating in that it never settles to grips with its quite honest intentions.

Like Mr. Roosevelt, Mr. McCleery has been brooding about the habits of columnists. His leading character is a homespun philosopher who writes of sunrises in Indiana for the edification of 11,000,000 readers, but who wishes to preach the doctrine of the brotherhood of man. His fiancee is a political writer who squelches his instincts toward liberal thought, telling him he simply isn't smart enough. His guiding genius eventually is a young girl who comes to the house and reports to him that the factory girls where she works all read his pieces, and he should say more clearly what he really thinks. At the end, the inference is he will learn political background and then will start along his new course.

One of Mr. McCleery's difficulties is that he has too slavish a regard for the place of love in the theatre. His columnist is pulled this way and that by his two girls friends; he seems like a little mouse of a man who would either denounce or praise fascism for another kiss. Liberals are made of sterner stuff, even groping liberals. The plot of "Hope for the Best" is contrived so that all the pieces fall in order, much like the blocks of a game called "dramagrams" they play on the stage of the Fulton. The characters are tugged, not from within but from without, and Mr. McCleery obviously is manipulating the strings. A respectable audience would like to hear him talk of liberalism, but while he leads up to it he never does.

It is questionable whether Franchot Tone is the best player for the role of the columnist. He is easy and likable, of course, and he manages a vague, shy quality which is all right part of the time. However, when Mr. McCleery grows indecisive, Mr. Tone aids and abets, and in several scenes he is shy to the point of cuteness. Jane Wyatt, as the young lady from the factory, is quite charming and poised, and if liberalism springs from the ladies, Miss Wyatt should have a high place on the ticket. Joan Wetmore is the political columnist and makes that role as disagreeable as possible, even though the script does not always make it clear, and Doro Merande is her usual comical self as the maid. Jack Hartley, into the cast on practically no notice, is the owner of a newspaper syndicate, and Leo Bulgakov is the gentleman who designs "dramagrams" for television. The Motley settings are lushly fitting to a man who has 11,000,000 readers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
February 8, 1945

'Hope for the Best' At Fulton Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

MY good friend, Jean Dalrymple, and my good acquaintance, Marc Connelly, joining forces as producers, brought "Hope for the Best" last night into the Fulton Theatre. Jane Wyatt and Franchot Tone are starred.

Billed as a "comedy" by William McCleery, "Hope for the Best" is replete with would-be witty sayings, social significance and not much else. This despite my prayers and candle-burning.

I did so want the first productional collaboration of Jean and Marc to be a triumphal one, a nifty and a knockout, a wonder and a wow. Because it isn't, all the well-wishing reviewers on Manhattan can't make it otherwise.

"Hope for the Best" talks too much and says too little. Like my mother's least favorite padre, it goes down deeper, stays down longer and comes up dryer than is desirable. Especially in a self-styled comedy.

I'll not be surprised if Mr. McCleery is yet to learn the difference between a stage and a soapbox. Notably where his final stanza is concerned.

"Hope for the Best" comes to a propagandish conclusion with Franchot Tone as a reformed columnist holding a globe between his knees. Out of this globe he extracts a smaller one. And out of the smaller globe he pulls an even smaller one. A good trick, if you can do it!

Messianic Mike

It seems Columnist Michael Jordan has eleven million readers, although circulation is what I think he means. He holds each reader in the hollow of his hand. They can't even think without him. Says he!

Michael has other things as well. An Indiana boy, he has a house in Connecticut with a fine and fancy living room. And a housekeeper. And a weekend party made up of a Thompsonian lady columnist, a prattling old professor, a uniformed younger brother, an overstuffed publisher and a lady who may or may not be Mrs. Jordan. Frankly, I couldn't make out Lucille Daly's professional, or amateur, standing.

Along with Michael, these folks-about-the-mansion take Michael very seriously. Should he change his style? Or shouldn't he? Should he turn political? Or should he continue Kieranian on his customers?

For three acts, Michael is undecided. For three acts, Michael's assorted house-guests try to make up his mind for him. Listening, you'd think the brave new world was dependent on his decision.

As for Michael himself, he putters at his typewriter. He puts the paper in. He pulls the paper out. And the hoke goes up the chimney just the same. What finally happens, I wouldn't know from nuttin'.

Hoping for Best

Franchot Tone keeps his face straight and projects the messianic Michael with great sincerity. But the messianic Michael eludes him. To a commercial newspaperman, he's too pea-em-ish for complete comfort.

Jane Wyatt gives her best to the unpigeonholed Lucille Daly. Miss Wyatt's best is excellent. Broadway has not seen her since "Quiet, Please" and "Night Music." But she's present in the films, playing, along with Cary Grant and Ethel Barrymore, in "None but the Lonely Heart" at the neighborhood houses.

Miss Wyatt has youth, beauty and talent. I'd like to see her round-acting in something worthy.

The Mrs. Bassett of Doro Merande is Doro Merande acting like a housekeeper. That's fun! Paul Potter is a personable younger brother to Franchot Tone's confused columnist. He's from radio.

Jean and Marc have done more than right by William McCleery's "comedy," going so far as to take the title at its words. Marc, as director, has staged it as if he believed it more than I can.

The single setting by Motley is one of the season's most decorative . . . Still hoping for the best where "Hope for the Best" is concerned, I'm afraid it's not exactly what Miss Dalrymple and Mr. Connelly longed for. There goes Mr. Jordan!

"The Overtons"

Comedy by Vincent Lawrence; staging by Elisabeth Bergner; settings designed by Edward Gilbert; costumes by Hattie Carnegie; presented by Paul Czinner at the Booth Theater Tuesday, February 6, 1945.

THE CAST

Cora Overton	Arlene Francis
Julia	Mary Lawrence
Judith Bancroft	Glenda Farrell
Jack Overton	Jack Whiting
Tommy	Donald Kohler
Minot	Charles Lang
James Lawson	Walter N. Greaza

NEW YORK TIMES
February 7, 1945

It's Love, Love, Love

By LEWIS NICHOLS

VINCENT LAWRENCE'S "The Overtons" is another of those melancholy sagas of the slinky suburbs, Westchester, no doubt, or Long Island. During the early part of the proceedings at the Booth a good deal of talk goes on about there being something different here. Indeed, that is so. The new twist in "The Overtons" has the man suspected of infidelity fail to deny it, even though he is innocent—a sort of misguided double negative, squared. That gives Mr. Lawrence a chance to put in a third act which is more interminable than the first two, and it gives an athletic cast the chance to carry on like a drunken jazz band after hours.

* * *

The setting is the home of the Overtons, who have been married eight and one-half years and are pretty firm about being in love. An actress living near by is making a play for Mr., and a man who spends his business hours amassing freight yards and his idle hours with the actress, has a secondary interest in Mrs. Mr. has a bank note coming due, a speed boat, a friend spending a night on another boat and a desire to see that friend in order to borrow $80,000 (American). Mr. and the actress are suspected of the suburban sin, though it develops finally she was just changing her clothes in order to go with him on the speed boat to see the friend on the other boat, and she couldn't go boating in the clothes she had on for the charity ball. Mrs. leaves home when Mr. will not deny the charge, but she comes back by 11:10. This sound confused? This is the bare outline. There are other plots.

Elizabeth Bergner, whose husband, Paul Czinner, is the producer, has directed—or permitted—the members of the cast to play as though they were other people. Arlene Francis, as Cora Overton, is about half-and-half Lynn Fontanne and Gertrude Lawrence, and Glenda Farrell as the actress, has more than a pinch of Tallulah Bankhead. Jack Whiting, the Jack Overton, has not thrown off his years of musical comedy, and he looks as if at any minute he might break into a hey-nonny-nonny. This might not be a bad idea, either. Walter N. Greaza is the most nearly normal; up to the time the script beats him down completely he looks capable of picking up either freight yards or actresses. Edward Gilbert's settings are the best part of the show, but it has been a long while since settings saved such matters as "The Overtons."

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
February 7, 1945

'The Overtons' Is a Bright, Credible Domestic Farce

By BURTON RASCOE

VINCENT LAWRENCE'S "The Overtons," which opened at the Booth last night, proved to be a bright and honest, credible, fast-moving, suspenseful and amusing domestic farce-comedy, which may be a bit frivolous as drama but gets down to the essential heart-of-things in the marital relations of two persons who have weathered the storm of eight years of adjustment and seem to be quite necessary to each other—or, as the saying goes, genuinely in love.

The play should have great popular appeal; for I have never known of a married couple wedded for any length of time (except a few psychopathic freaks whose marriages should have been prohibited by law in the first place) whose domestic happiness—and difficulties—are not, to a very considerable extent, very deftly portrayed in this fable of the Overtons. The emotion of recognition, alone, should guarantee the comedy's success.

It's Bourgeois

Everything about the play is, in the quaint, derisive patois of the advanced Markists, "bourgeois." But there are about 130,000,000 people in this country who are bourgeois enough to consider that marriage is a solemn contract, entered into by two persons presumably of sound and adult minds, which entails certain obligations, responsibilities, compromises and adjustments to make the enterprise a success; and that it is an indication of immature minds and arrested emotional development when two persons, obviously in definite need of each other, blow up over trivialities, take refuge in false pride, indulge in hammy theatrical recriminations (in which they employ all the worst sentimental cliches of corny melodrama), disavow that faith in each other which was the basis of their mating, blow up and seek severence in the divorce courts, with messy airings of their real and fancied grievances.

The Overtons delightfully played by Arlene Francis and Jack Whiting, are simply very normal, attractive, married persons. They are above the average scale, in income; but that is only because Jack Overton is a clear-headed, hard-working, shrewd and dependable young businessman, for all his apparent casualness, "play-boy" instincts and fondness for an occasional bat with the boys. He has come up in the world by his own honest efficiencies.

Well Acted

The Overtons are considered by their friends to be at once eccentric, old-fashioned and one of these "ideal couples" who must be secretly very unhappy, otherwise they would not put on such a show of adoring each other in the presence of others; they must be emotionally vulnerable and unfaithful, otherwise they would not appear to be so monogamous, while at the same time being so tolerant of tomcats and Mehitabels like themselves.

But the Mehitabels such as Judith (played with appealing comical resourcefulness by Glenda Farrell) and the tomcats such as Bill and James (played with properly baffled simulations of stupidity and insensitiveness by Charles Lang and Walter N. Greaza) are emotionally immature and profoundly frustrated, rather pathetic human beings, compensating for their deficiencies by interminable series of love affairs, all brief, unsatisfactory and unsavory—all leaving them with silly, "philosophical" notions about how to fight the duel of sex. The story tells how Miss Francis, in a moment of weakness, allowed Mr. Greaza and Mr. Lang to cause her to doubt her husband's fidelity and how she became what is vulgarly called "a trunk packer" (that is, a female who is always threatening to walk out on her husband when she doesn't get her way in the household), and of the result when Mr. Whiting lets her walk out without attempting to plead his case.

The play is brilliantly staged by Elizabeth Bergner; the gowns are very chic, and the sets, by Edward Gilbert, are esthetically satisfying. The comedy is hereby definitely recommended.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
February 7, 1945

Fun in the Suburbs

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

ANOTHER stage couple is put through several foolish marital paces in "The Overtons." The new Vincent Lawrence comedy script examines into the life of a comfortably happy suburban husband and wife who boast that nothing can break them up. Of course they run into heavy weather, and then find out that they were right all the time. The dialogue outlining this temporary domestic misfortune runs from philosophy to an attempt at light drawing-room comedy, but in either mood it is underlined with nonsense. Like so many other plays about marriages that run full circle, "The Overtons" describes just about zero.

* * *

The characters appear to be moved about at the author's convenience rather than through logical motivation. When a predatory actress and evil-minded business man determine to take the Overton's dare and break up their happy home, the play jumps back and forth between attitudes that are only contrived by the script. When Mrs. Overton hears that her husband has been up in the actress's boudoir she is ridiculously calm, but when he comes home unharmed she throws a tantrum. There is an obligato of conversation about liquor, romantic psychology and God that completely confuses one of the characters and leads another to remark something like "There were a lot of philosophers here but none of them made any sense." The line is a fairly accurate description of the play itself.

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Jack Whiting labors valiantly to become the perfect, carefree husband the script wants him to be, doing as competent a light comedy job as the outlines of the role will allow. Glenda Farrell wears slacks and is "just one of the boys" as the actress. Walter N. Greaza is a caricature of a Wall Street tycoon, and Arlene Francis trips across the stage trying to be an understanding wife. Even the direction by Elizabeth Bergner has its crazy moments; when Mrs. Overton decides to walk out on her spouse, she exits up the stairs and returns on stage after only a moment or two with her suitcase fully packed. For all its advice to the married lovelorn, "The Overtons" remains as much of a wrinkled random helter-skelter as the clothes in that suitcase must have been.

NEW YORK SUN
February 7, 1945

'The Overtons' Trite and Meager Comedy, and It's Badly Acted, Too

By WARD MOREHOUSE

VINCENT LAWRENCE, who revealed a deft hand with dialogue in comedies that he used to write for the New York stage, comes back to Broadway after an absence of fourteen years and he returns sadly off form. His new comedy, "The Overtons," brought into the Booth last night by Paul Czinner, is an inept and scrambled play, badly acted and directed.

In "The Overtons" there isn't so much as a glimmer of the talent that was revealed by Mr. Lawrence when he was turning out plays in the Twenties, and generally writing them for William Harris Jr. This new piece gets steadily worse as it goes along and it is completely out of control at the finish. Elizabeth Bergner, in her first directorial job in this country, has been of no help to a trite and meager script.

Mr. Lawrence again takes up his favorite subject, marriage, and gives you a few frenzied hours in the lives of the Overtons, who have been happily married for eight and a half years. He relates how Cora Overton walks out on husband Jack when she suspects him of infidelity. But she returns shortly afterward, bag in hand, and the Overtons, bless them, are cuddling and cooing at the end, just as they have been doing for a greater part of the evening.

Several strange characters — a predatory actress, who has an eye for handsome Jack; a befuddled financier, who fancies himself irresistible, and a nitwit All-America half-

back, who just gets in the way, are introduced by Mr. Lawrence and contribute their share to the evening's prevailing absurdity.

There is no glory for the cast. Arlene Francis, a really capable actress, shouldn't be judged on this performance at the Booth. Jack Whiting still has the technic of the song-and-dance man. Glenda Farrell has an unhappy time of it as the restless and supposedly glamorous Judith and Walter N. Greaza is quite explosive and very futile as the go-getting money man.

Vincent Lawrence seems to have lost the trick that went into the writing of "In Love With Love" and "Sour Grapes." And "Two Fellows and a Girl," to go back a few years. "The Overtons" is silly and senseless.

The drama was pushed around last night at the Booth.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
February 7, 1945

'The Overtons' Opens At the Booth Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

VINCENT LAWRENCE'S "The Overtons," which practically poured itself last night into the Booth Theatre, is the drinkingest play I've ever seen. All out of sober breath, it really should have been called "The Elbow Benders."

Taking place, apparently, among the country club set of Barleycorn, Long Island, each of Mr. Lawrence's characters was born with a glass in his hand. Morning, noon, night it's gurgle-gurgle from the bottles and guzzle-guzzle from the Long Islanders.

In place of Julie, the Overtons' pretty maid, that hard-drinking household should have had Think-a-Drink Hoffman as their butler.

Yet if these lush Long Islanders didn't dash from Scotch to Bourbon, from gin to brandy, almost nothing would be going on up on the Booth Theatre's stage. Little but drinking happens in the Vincent Lawrence comedy of bad manners.

What little but drinking does happen is none too interesting. When the author of "The Overtons" isn't writing in the direction of "Private Lives," he's writing in the direction of "Up in Mabel's Room."

Producer Paul Czinner just can't disguise this fact, even if he has given the new arrival a very tony cast, some very tony costumes and two very tony settings, one upstairs, one down.

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Across the Bar

When the curtain first rises on "The Elbow Benders"—beg pardon, "The Overtons"—Jack Overton comes rolling in, accompanied by Tommy and Bill, his boon companions, and an offstage thunderstorm. Each is a little phony.

Fresh from the Barleycorn Yacht Club, where they've been sailing at the bar, they're right smart, having furnished themselves with an alcoholic foundation on which to build throughout the forthcoming comedy.

Cora Overton is there to greet them, pretending to be worried. Judith Bancroft is also there. Cora is Jack's understanding wife. Judith would like to be.

Immediately the gurgle-gurgle and the guzzle-guzzle begin. And they never cease until, up in Cora's room, Jack and Cora put out the lights and go to bed after a prize fight heard over the radio and a free-for-all seen out in the open.

I'm not sure what the free-for-all is about, but it includes Cora and Jack, Jack's pal Bill, a dastardly Wall Streeter called James Lawson, the lady-on-the-loose known as Judith, and Julia, the Overtons' aforesaid pretty maid.

Frankly, I'm vague about the details, along with the playwright, the players and last night's congregation. It doesn't matter.

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Too Much to Drink

The leading ladies, Arlene Francis as Cora Overton and Glenda Farrel as Judith Bancroft, are all dressed up in Miss Carnegie's eye-filling costumes, aided and abetted by makeup credited to none other than Dorothy Gray.

The trouble is, they've no definite place to go. So they spend the evening repeating Vincent Lawrence's sayings, some of which are wittier, if not wiser, than others. Not infrequently, sex raises its attractive head, and, as is the case with "Good Night Ladies," every onstage character makes the most of it. Last night's Long Islanders fuel themselves with alcohol.

The men, wolves the shyest sheep could see through, do what the playwright tells them, especially Jack Whiting, who pretends to be Jack Overton, Charles Lang, who pretends to be Bill Minot, and Walter Greaza, who pretends to be James Lawson.

As Tallulah Bankhead is said to have said about something entirely different, there is less to "The Overtons" than meets the eye. For Mr. Czinner has given it a top drawer production, with stunning sets by Edward Gilbert, fetching costumes by Hattie Carnegie and breakneck direction by the Elizabeth Bergner who, in private life, is Mrs. Czinner. Nevertheless, all drink and no play make a dullish evening.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
February 7, 1945

'Overtons' Same Old Sex Story: The Blonde Goes for the Husband

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IN Vincent Lawrence's new comedy, "The Overtons," the topic of sex is like the sparrow that got mixed up in one hell of a badminton game — it gets furiously battled about for quite a while and it looks sorry and bedraggled when it's finally out of play.

In the acting, too, "The Overtons" is something like a badminton game, for it has been directed by Elizabeth Bergner. All by herself on the stage Miss Bergner can be as busy as an anthill, and she has goaded her cast into great feats of energy. If you think anybody in "The Overtons" is just going to sit and talk about sex you are mistaken. They all run around while talking, as if Miss Bergner had given each one the hotfoot.

Well, anyhow, this makes a livelier evening than just sitting, and Arlene Francis, Glenda Farrell, Jack Whiting, Walter Greaza and Charles Lang are expert and very amiable. Mr. Lawrence has written his play not at all badly and it contains some funny and well-timed lines. But he wrote too much about too little.

How To Be Sophisticated

The dramatist who hopes he is writing a sophisticated comedy starts, first, with a fairly lavish joint in Westchester or on Long Island —or, as it is some times put in the program, "near New York." He gets himself a smartly decorated living room (saving the bedroom for later on, whenever people get good and tired of the living room).

He peoples it, first, with a man and wife. Then he brings in whatever is the feminine for a tomcat—a blonde who goes for the husband. He has a couple of servants, and one or two of the better-class neighbors. Sooner or later everybody is going to have to put on dinner clothes, and everybody drinks a lot all the time.

Did He or Didn't He?

Then the author of a sophisticated comedy really goes to work on his plot—and nearly every time it is too little and the last curtain is too late. The plot is simply this: Did the husband misbehave with the blonde, or did it just look that way? The ending is always the same, for playwrights are lovers of home and fireside: wife and husband patch things up and live happily ever after.

Mr. Whiting and Miss Francis are the Overtons—ideally mated for eight and one-half years. He calls her Nifty and she calls him Friday. Miss Farrell is the male-weary but man-hungry blonde. She fails, incidentally, to ravish Mr. Whiting—but the topic sure does get talked-up.

I'd say that Mr. Lawrence's play is a better sex comedy than was "The Perfect Marriage" or "In Bed We Cry," but still I don't care a lot for it.

NEW YORK POST
February 7, 1945

'The Overtons' Opens at the Booth—A Liquid Comedy About Very Little

By JAMES ARONSON

"THE OVERTONS" a new comedy by Vincent Lawrence, was poured onto the stage of the Booth Theatre last night by Paul Czinner, who produced it, and his wife, Elizabeth Bergner, who staged it. Poured is the word. Most of the action took place at or near a liquor cabinet, although I timed one hiatus in which not one single member of the cast took a drink for five full minutes.

Mr. Lawrence is credited with having written several plays with sparkling dialogue in the twenties. Perhaps the talk in "The Overtons" would have sparkled two decades ago too, but it certainly doesn't in 1945.

These Are the People

As a matter of fact, the play reared right back into the roaring twenties in its characters. There is a wicked banker with a heart of goldbrick; a young (Westchester, Connecticut) couple who are as gay and charming as a couple of Katzenjammer Kids; a brittle, jaded lady who wisecracks to cover a fitfully bleeding soul; and a lugubrious All-American halfback who moons about the time he funmbled against Harvard. But you get the idea.

I won't belabor you with the story. I'm still trying to figure it out. But mostly it concerns Sex and the Overtons, who have found The Secret to true love. And if you think it comes in a bottle and has an alcoholic aura, you're just an old cynic.

There are some nice people in the show, and too bad for them. Arlene Francis, decked out in fine style by Hattie Carnegie, almost made Mrs. Overton appealing, and it was not her fault that she didn't completely succeed. Jack Whiting played her playboy (read Rover Boy) husband with plenty of bounce, when he let go of the bottle.

Wrestling Matches Too

Walter Greaza, a capable actor, was the banker. He was called on to storm and rage and tear his hair, which he did nobly. Glenda Farrell played the wry lady, and there again the odds were too much. Included in the action were a couple of wrestling matches, no holds barred, and one free-for-all.

The last act was noisy and funny in paris but far too long.

It's hard to write these words about a play by Mr. Lawrence, because I discovered that we were both born in Roxbury, Mass., and you know how you feel about those things. Been back there lately, Mr. Lawrence? You'd never know the old place. I'm sure you wouldn't find any Overtons there, but down around Dudley Street, you'd find a lot of live people who would make much better theatre.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
February 7, 1945

Another Sad Little Comedy

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

BACK in the 20's, as I recall, Vincent Lawrence wrote some agreeable enough little comedies. Now, after a lapse of years, he has returned to Broadway with *The Overtons*, a play it is just not possible to say anything pleasant about. It is a hopeless mess into which Mr. Lawrence has flung gobbets of this, and hunks of that, and scraps of something else—mixing every style of entertainment from sophisticated sex comedy to rough-and-tumble farce. Any such mixture would, I think, be bad even if its several elements were not; but all the elements are very bad in themselves. And to make things worse, *The Overtons* has been punished with a wretched production. Elizabeth Bergner has gummed up the direction, and people like Jack Whiting and Arlene Francis, who can be attractive enough in the right parts, have been thrust into the wrong ones.

The play as much as it is anything, is a sort